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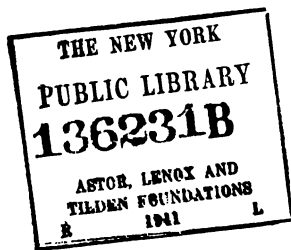
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CHRISTIE'S CHOICE.

CHAPTER I.

SIGNS AND PORTENTS.

THE night was warm and sultry. Upon the trees outside her window, Christabel could see that the leaves hung drooping and lifeless, unstirred by the slightest breath of air. Her room was resonant with the songs of myriads of mosquitoes, great swarms of which had come in the wake of the recent storms. These were pitched in a minor key, touchingly plaintive, but experience had taught her the meaning of the siren strains. It was but the bugle call to battle—the treacherous prelude to a ferocious attack at every vulnerable point of the armor in which she had encased herself. Resistance she had found to be useless, and every suggested remedy had thus far proved unavailing to scatter their forces. Nothing could quench their bloodthirstiness. Having once tasted the elixir of life, they cried angrily and persistently for more. Tooth and nail they fell upon her, thrusting their lance-like tongues into the

delicate flesh, and drawing forth in tiny streamlets the precious fluid with which her fresh young veins were filled. Their assiduous attentions together with the intense heat, made sleep an impossibility.

In sheer desperation, she at last rose from her bed. Already, at risk of suffocation, she had enveloped her head and neck in a veil of gauze, and she wore thick gloves on her hands. She now drew on a pair of stout walking-boots, feeling doubtful whether even they would be a sufficient protection against her enemies. Thus shielded, she picked up a huge palm-leaf fan and seated herself by an open window. "Who would live in such a country?" she grumbled, as she fanned herself, in the vain attempt to cool her fevered face.

Seldom had she experienced such heat, and it had been only within the past few days that she had made the acquaintance of those small pests which had become such instruments of torture as to render her life a burden and a weariness. In her Virginian home, she had scarcely known of their existence, and during her stay in Texas she had hitherto remained in the same state of happy ignorance. She was assured that they rarely visited this portion of the state, but she was gradually learning rather to question the veracity of her friends, who, however truthful in other respects, always pictured everything Texan in the brightest tints of rose-color.

Yet, she was forced to admit that their failure to provide nets, or other means of defense against her assailants, was so much in their favor in the present instance. Evidently they had considered this an unnecessary precaution, and she remembered that she had now been here nearly a year, and had never before



been so annoyed. The summer had been distinguished by a drought of unprecedented length and severity, even in this thirsty land which the rain-god seems sometimes almost wholly to forget. For days and weeks, a brazen sky hung over the parched earth, with the sun, a great globe of flaming fire, slowly drinking up the last remains of moisture left upon it. Such was its terrible power, that a vast bed of bog or peat was ignited by spontaneous combustion, burning so fiercely that men shook their heads and talked in subdued tones of that awful time when the world would be once more destroyed, and by a sea of fire, on which could float no ark of safety.

There were many signs and portents construed by the superstitious as foreboding the speedy end of all things. Earthquakes, pestilences, famines, wars and rumors of wars—all these had come to verify the prophecy that such calamities would precede the final dissolution of the planet on which we live. Only the previous year Europe had been the scene of a bloody struggle, and now the tocsin of alarm had been sounded in our own land. John Brown had made his famous raid at Harper's Ferry, and whispers of attempts at insurrection among the negroes were afloat in the air. Small wonder was it that the ignorant connected this freak of nature with the disturbances which threatened an upheaval of society such as the world had never known.

And still the pitiless sun blazed on. The usual refreshing southerly breezes almost ceased to blow, or came freighted with the hot breath of the Tropics—as though they had passed over a sea of molten lead instead of the cooling waters of the Mexican Gulf. At times, too, they were like a simoom of the desert,

bearing upon their wings whirling clouds of sand which filled the air and temporarily obscured the sky, to fall in a blistering, scorching shower, shrivelling everything upon which it laid its withering touch.

So it continued until the weeks had lengthened into months, and men's hearts fainted within them as all hope died away. But one day, when every living, breathing thing seemed well-nigh at its last gasp, there arose a cloud in the east no bigger than "a man's hand." It grew, and spread, and blackened until there was "a horror as of great darkness" upon all the earth. Into this fell lurid gleams from the lightning, as it played over the inky skies in a wild, fantastic dance. Accompanying it was heard the dread orchestra of the heavens, beginning with a low refrain, and swelling and swelling until the loudest organ peal would have been to it but as the wailing cry of a puny infant. Then did the storm-king "let loose his dogs of war," and for a time all was chaos. The rush of the hurricane, the crash of falling trees, the roar of the thunder, and the heavy plash of the first great rain-drops were mingled in awful, inextricable confusion. Men and beasts listened in terror and delight. They were willing to undergo this baptism of fire for the sake of what was coming after. At last a prayer of thanksgiving went up from thousands of grateful hearts as

" Down rushed the rain
Impetuous, and continued till the earth
No more was seen."

For hours it came with steady unceasing pour, but at sunset the clouds broke away, and lo, in the east, a

splendid rainbow arched itself, a reminder of the loving care of Him who has promised that "while the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest shall not cease." And so, day after day the showers fell, until the dry beds of streams were filled with swollen torrents and all the "swags" were stagnant pools forming prolific breeding-places for the mosquitoes. Vegetation now grew rich and rank. The cotton plants, so long stunted in their growth, shot upward into trees, tall and strong, whose branching limbs were laden with the lovely pink and white blossoms of their early youth. What a rich harvest there would be if only the envious frost would delay its coming.

Christabel sat thinking of all these things, and of her varied experiences of the past year, as she gazed out upon the moon-lit earth. Secure now from their attacks, she found a certain enjoyment in listening to the rhythmic chorus of her quondam foes, joining itself to that of the katy-dids and other nocturnal insects outside. Of human life there was no sign, but the air was literally throbbing with the voices of these small creatures. Too timid to venture forth by day, they made full amends for their enforced quietude now that they held undisturbed possession of their coveted realm. Now and then she could hear the hooting of an owl in the distant swamp, or the hoarse bellowing of an alligator or bull-frog. Again the sharp, yelping cry of a wolf would break upon the still air, to be answered by the fierce bark of some wakeful watch-dog.

Once there came a sound so peculiar that she never forgot it. It was like the mewing of a cat which has been robbed of her young, or the moaning cry of a suffering child. She remembered, with a shudder,

that she had been told there were panthers in the river-bottom. A vague, unreasoning fear seized upon her. Rising, she was about to return to her bed, when her eyes fell upon a little table near her; on it lay a small telescope belonging to her uncle. The sight of it changed the current of her thoughts; with its aid she was fond of searching out the various constellations in the heavens. It was only a fancy, for she knew little or nothing of the science of astronomy. Again seating herself, she began a leisurely survey of the great dome so thickly studded with stars whose brilliancy could not be dimmed even by the splendor of a full harvest moon.

At last, growing weary, she laid it upon the window-sill, and, leaning her head upon her hand, fell into a meditation so profound that midnight had passed before she was aroused from it. For some time she had been vaguely conscious that another and different sound had been added to those which had made themselves familiar to her ears—the distant hum of human voices. She was not long in discovering that it came from the negro-quarter. Catching up the spy-glass, she glanced in that direction and saw something that excited her curiosity to the utmost. She started up hastily, and, walking lightly across the room, opened a door leading into one adjoining her own. She made a slight gesture of disgust as a strong odor of kerosene oil greeted her entrance. “Phew!” she said, with a smile, “Jack’s remedy for the mosquitoes is worse than the disease.” That young gentleman, however, lay in the moonlight, sleeping soundly in spite of his disagreeable surroundings.

“Jack! Jack!” she called, shaking him by the shoulder, “wake up, old fellow, I want you.”

He stirred uncasily, muttered something incoherent and again sank into slumber.

She shook him more vigorously. "Jack, you *must* wake. I have something to tell you."

He half rose, glanced at her, and, with a smothered yell, covered his head with the sheet. Christabel at first thought this movement the result of modesty on his part, but, suddenly remembering what a spectacle she must have presented to the half-awakened boy in her war accouterments, at once divined the true cause.

"Jack ! Jack ! it's only I—Christie ; surely you are not afraid of me, are you ?"

He started up, wrathfully indignant. "'Fraid ! Who says I'm 'fraid ? Whut have I got to be 'fraid of, I'd like to know ?"

"Nothing, nothing, but, Jack, listen ! There are such queer doings among the negroes in the quarter. I want you to go with me to see what they are up to."

Jack stared at her in amazement. "Are you crazy, Christie ? You go to the quarters at this time o'night ? Whut'll father and mother say ?"

"I fear they'll disapprove, but I must go all the same, Jack. Somehow I feel as if a great deal might depend upon it. If you won't go with me, I must venture alone. I believe you're afraid, anyhow."

"Whut in the name o' common sense do you keep harpin' on my bein' a coward fur, Christie ? You ain't got no right to 'cuse me o' no sech a thing. I'm a great min' not to go with you jest fur sayin' that !"

"Oh Jack, do hurry up and put on your clothes. It will all be over before we can get there."

"Well, ef you'll promus faithful to stan' by me ef the Gener'l fin's out about this caper, I'll go. I dunno

—he might take a notion to whale a feller fur gittin' you inter sech a scrape."

"There ! I knew it ! I told you you were afraid ! I'll guarantee your safety so far as uncle is concerned. And now is it the negroes or the bugaboos on the way you dread ?"

"I tell you I ain't 'fraid o' nary nigger 'at ever went unhung," affirmed he, stoutly ; "an' as to the boogerboos, I reckon we won't see nothin' wuss lookin'n yourself. You do look awful with your head tied up that-a-way, Chris ! When I fust seen you, I thought you was the ole feller hisself."

"Well, are you ready ?" she called from her room, where she was hastily throwing a dark wrapper over her white night-dress, and exchanging her boots for a pair of slippers in which she might walk more softly.

"In a minit," was his reply.

She smiled to see that the delay was caused by his strapping about his waist a rusty old pistol which he claimed as his especial property. Still, he asseverated that he was not in the least afraid, and, indeed, he was actuated more by a desire to imitate his elders in the reprehensible practice of wearing fire-arms, and to appear a man in Christie's eyes, than from any lurking fear. He had for her a most profound admiration, and liked her to think well of him.

"You needn't be 'fraid o' nothin' hurtin' you as long as I'm with you, Chris," he whispered, as they stealthily made their way down the stair-case, at the same time laying his hand significantly on the pistol.

"I know you'll take care of me, Jack," she returned, affectionately stroking the tawny hair.

Jack's heart swelled within him. At that moment he would have braved any danger in her defense. A

caress from Christie was cheaply earned at any cost. "Ef ole Jowler sees us he'll raise a howl, shore," he said, apparently taking no notice of what had passed. "There he is now."

A few words, however, sufficed to quiet him, and they stole out of the yard without disturbance.

"We must keep well in the shadow of the trees and houses," said Christie. "It won't do for us to be seen. The negroes are in the hollow square formed by their houses, Jack—such crowds of them—and they are dancing the strangest dance you ever saw. I want to get at the meaning of it. Where can we go to get the best view of them?"

Jack reflected a moment. "Oh, I know! the ole blacksmith shop. It's right clost to 'em, an' we can slip in at the back door an' hide ourselves behin' the bellus an' peep thoo the cracks at 'em a-cuttin' up their didoes."

"Capital, if only we can get there without being discovered."

"Thunder! how the moon is a-shinin'," grumbled Jack; "but we can go 'long by the gyarden palin's 'tel we git to the fence, an' then we can keep in the shadder of it. "Hello!" he continued, with the air of one who has made a sudden discovery, "The moon's full, ain't it, Christie? I bet I know now what they're up to. Ole uncle Hylas, you know, he's a full-blooded Afercan,—was eighteen years ole when he was brought over to this country, an' the other niggers all go to him fur love-charms an' that sort o' thing, an' every full moon's the time when he's crazier'n any other, though it's my privit erpinion 'at he's always crazy. He's jest a-kickin' up some sort of a rumpus to-night an' all them fool niggers a-stan'in' an' lookin'

on like as ef he was a prophit or somethin' gran', an' they'll do anything he'll take it inter his head to tell 'em."

They reached the shop in safety, and having first ascertained that it was untenanted, crept into it and secreted themselves in a dark corner whence they had a full view of the proceedings in the open space beyond. It was with bated breath that Christie regarded the strange, weird scene.

In the centre of a circle of dancing negroes stood a tall, demon-like figure, muttering incantations in an unknown tongue, and, from time to time, throwing something into a small fire burning near him. Each time that he did this, tongues of blue flame shot upward, giving to him and his companions an indescribably ghastly appearance. Upon his head was the bleached skull of an ox, with wide-spreading horns, and through its hollow eye-sockets shone great balls of fire, while out of its nostrils issued streams of smoke. His body was enveloped in a flowing robe of white, marked here and there with mysterious, cabalistic characters, blood-red in hue. The dancers had rubbed flour or some white substance on their black faces, and their hair, plaited and wrapped with white cotton strings, stood up like so many horns in miniature. They had decked themselves in what finery they possessed, and altogether looked grotesque enough to have represented a scene from the Inferno. Clasp- ing each other's hands, they circled round their high priest in a wild, witch-like dance.

"Je-whilikens!" exclaimed Jack, as he watched the unique performance. "They're a-cuttin' up high jinks, ain't they, Chris?"

"Oh, Jack, what does make you use such horrid expressions?"

"Whut, Christie, can't a feller talk about Villikins an' his Dinah 'uthout gittin' a lecture?"

"Oh, that was it, was it? I beg your pardon, I misunderstood you."

"No you didn't, Chris. I did say that ugly word I promused you t'other day not to repeat."

"It's not only that word, Jack, but so many others as well. You use such dreadfully ungrammatical language too—talk very much like the negroes, in fact, and it grieves me, because I know you can do better if you only would."

"Oh well, I'll try—some o' these days," he returned, with a boy's impatience of reproof. "*Mirabile dictu!* look, Christie! How's that fur high?"

Christie smiled as she obeyed. Jack had recently begun the study of Latin and liked to air his limited stock of knowledge upon occasion. However, even this was preferable to those horrid expletives which sometimes fell from his lips.

But all recollection of his delinquencies was soon lost in her absorbed interest in the scene before her. The singular, monotonous chant of the master of ceremonies gradually grew louder, and with the increasing volume of sound his votaries accelerated their movements. Around and around him they whirled, until it made her dizzy to watch them. Yet she continued to gaze as if fascinated. At length, disengaging themselves from each other, each set up a wild waltz on his own account, until exhausted, they dropped, one by one, upon the ground and remained there perfectly quiet, although sometimes trampled upon by their more vigorous companions. Finally, only one

remained—a tall, stalwart man, who still continued his exertions, although his labored breath gave token that his strength must soon give way. With a wailing cry, he at last fell to the earth.

Meantime, groups of negroes had assembled around them, watching the performance in awed silence. The high priest now knelt and, stretching out his arms toward Heaven, muttered what seemed to be a prayer in the same gibberish he had hitherto used. Then, taking up a bowl which Christie guessed to be filled with some liquid, he advanced to the last dancer, who, at his bidding, half rose and knelt humbly before him. His face, looking ghastly now in the moonlight, was turned full toward her and her companion. The high priest, dipping his fingers into the bowl and still muttering to himself, made a blood-red mark—in shape, a Maltese cross—upon his forehead, each cheek, and chin.

“It’s blood, Jack !” said Christie in a whisper, tightening her clutch upon his arm.

“Pshaw ! ’tain’t nothin’ but poke-juice,” he replied disdainfully.

She said no more, but watched the devotee, if such he might be called, as he bowed his head and, with clasped hands, repeated after his master what seemed to be a solemn oath. Christie shuddered. Of what nature might be that vow ? A thought came into her mind so horrible, that for a moment her brain reeled. Could there be any truth in the vague rumors she had heard of an attempted insurrection soon to take place ?

“What does it all mean, Jack ?” she asked, in a scarcely audible voice.

“Don’t be skeered, Christie. Tain’t nothin’ but uncle Hylas’ outlandish doin’s. Lord only knows whut

he does 'em fur—I don't. That's him with the cow's head, an' he's got a can'le inside it, an' greased papers over the eye-holes. I've fixed 'em that-a-way, a many a time—an' punkins an' gourds too. You jest take an' cut a face"—

"Yes, never mind about it now," she said gently. "I want to watch uncle Hylas."

One by one the prostrate dancers went through the same mysterious ceremony as the first, after which each one glided away toward the cabins. When the last was gone, others came forward and forming a ring as before, began the same strange, wild dance.

"There are so many negroes here to-night, Jack. Surely they cannot all belong to my uncle?"

"No, I've seen a good many who live in the neighborhood."

"Is this a usual thing here? Are they allowed to have these midnight meetings with no one near to check the mad frenzy into which they may be thrown?"

"Oh, well, it's not allowed—of course not—but the niggers have 'em all the same."

"Jack, I'm afraid this means something serious. It's all very terrible to me."

"No, tain't nothin' but Uncle Hylas' foolishness, I tell you. He'd do anything to be a big man amongst 'em."

"There lies the danger, Jack, for it seems to me he can make them do anything he likes."

"Well, they are mighty big fools—there's no denyin' that, an' there's no tellin' how fur this thing might be carried."

"I think I ought to tell my uncle."

"I b'lieve I'd sleep on it fust," he sagely advised. "Ef you was to wake up the ole gentleman now, he'd

be shore to be in a bad humor, an' might give a feller hail Columbia fur fetchin' you out here at this time o' night."

Christie laughed. "Why will you persist in speaking of your father in that way, Jack? One would think him the veriest tyrant instead of the mildest-tempered man in existence. I dare say, that never in his life did he give you one of those 'whalin's' you are always talking about—the more's the pity, I'm sometimes inclined to think. But come, we must be going. This dance seems to be a mere repetition of what we've already seen."

She was very grave as they made their way back to the house, taking little or no notice of Jack's jesting remarks. She found herself still unable to sleep when she returned to her room, so much had she been excited by what she had seen. Her thoughts wandered back to her childhood and the dreadful stories told her by old family servants of the insurrection headed by Nat Turner in Southampton. She remembered well how horrible it had all seemed to her, and the impression then made upon her young mind had never been erased.

All her life she had regarded an uprising of the negroes as the worst evil that could befall the Southern people, and the vague fear of such an event had weighed upon her like a nightmare. To many of those who had served her family for generations she was very strongly attached, and she believed them to be sincerely fond of her, yet always this fear had come between them, an intangible yet persistent barrier to the perfect confidence that would otherwise have existed. This feeling had led her to ponder much and deeply the question, "Is it right to hold human

beings in a bondage from which there is no hope of escape? Would not we, in like circumstances, feel justified in securing our freedom by any means in our power?" she often asked herself, and sighed as the answer came, "Aye, would we at any cost, no matter what the sacrifice to human life and property." She, in common with so many of our Southern people, came to the conclusion that the institution of slavery was a very great evil, but one which, for the present at least, must be endured.

It was not to be expected that a young, inexperienced girl should find a remedy for a disorder which had baffled the skill of the profoundest statesmen. The greed of gain that had incited our forefathers to tear from their homes the progenitors of the present black race, had brought with it a curse to their children, and their children's children after them. At least so thought Christie, and she had been so open in the expression of her views, as to earn for herself the title of "Little Abolitionist" among her friends, many of whom sought in vain to change her opinions. Her father, who had no scruples as to his moral right to own slaves, had given her *Bledsoe on Liberty and Slavery* to read, saying that surely she could not reply to such unanswerable arguments as he brought to bear upon the subject. She could not; what woman was ever known to reason upon such a matter? She can only feel, and, in nine cases out of ten, her intuitions are a safer guide than the boasted reason of the sterner sex. Her grandmother, whom she regarded as infallible in other respects, had often asserted her belief that the negroes were an inferior race, fit only for the servile position they held—that they were intended by their Creator to be just such a factor in

the world's economy. In proof of this, she would cite from her Bible instance after instance in which He had stamped such relations with His seal and approval. Christie found, indeed, on consulting the book, that slavery in some form had existed from time immemorial, but in a very different state of society from that in her own country. She noted, furthermore, that wherever it had been tolerated, men had sunk gradually into effeminacy, to be surely followed by decay. Might not the degeneracy of the Jews themselves have been partly owing to this very fact? Yet she remembered that men were not held in perpetual bondage among them, but were allowed the privilege of purchasing their freedom, or were entitled, after so many years of service, to go free. Coming down to later times, she recalled the evils entailed upon the Romans by this same system of slavery, and regarded it as not the least of the causes that led to the ultimate destruction of that power which had once ruled the world.

So, in theory, Christie remained a stanch abolitionist, though every day of her life her wants were ministered to by slaves, of whose attentions she was the willing recipient. If sometimes twitted for this, she would so ingenuously acknowledge her inconsistency, as to disarm unfriendly criticism. She insisted that her principles were right, but admitted that she had not the moral courage to act up to them.

As she pondered all these things in her heart to-night, it was stirred by a great pity for the enslaved race, which, in its present condition, could never rise above the ignorance and superstition that bound it down as with chains of iron. If only they could be freed without injury to the whites,—without bloodshed

on either side ! But to have them take matters into their own hands,—they in whom the animal nature so predominated,—to give them supremacy over their masters and their masters' families, even for a few days,—the thought chilled her blood until her veins seemed filled with ice. Her teeth chattered in fear,—her senses almost deserted her, but, after a time, she reasoned herself into calmness, and lay perfectly quiet.

Clouds had now risen, and as they gradually overspread the moon, the light died out of her room, and she found her thoughts growing confused and indistinct. Presently she felt her bed being gently moved. Opening her eyes, she discovered that it was now standing in the centre of the room, while all about her flickered blue lights like those she had seen at the midnight revel. Then she saw those same demon-like figures circling around it on soundless feet, their movements apparently directed by their high priest, who, still in his strange habiliments, and wearing upon his head the grinning ox-skull, stood at the foot of the bed waving his arms about, at times, gesticulating wildly, but maintaining perfect silence. She made an effort to rise, but found herself bound hand and foot. She strove to speak, but her tongue seemed palsied. Uncle Hylas had cast his spell upon her, and she was powerless against it. Suddenly, at a peculiar motion of his arm, down went his followers upon their knees, still clasping each others' hands, and forming a complete circle around her bed. Then he spoke low and solemnly : " My frien's, de sperit tell me we mus' have de blood uv er young chreeschun gal 'fo' we kin go any funder wid whut we's erbout ter do, an' she mus' be white an' innercen' es de snow.

Yere lays sich er one berfo' yer. Shell I draw de blood ?”

All made a gesture of assent. Then he knelt and repeated rapidly some words in his native tongue which seemed an invocation to his god. Rising, he laid back the sheet, and placing a basin under her feet, inserted a lancet into a vein of each. She felt the warm blood gush over them, and saw the rush of the crimson tide, but still she could not move nor speak. With a howl of demoniacal delight, Uncle Hylas stooped, and applying his lips to the orifice in one, eagerly drew into his mouth the rich red fluid.

“Now, indeed, is all hope gone,” thought poor Christie. “The vampire is no fable, after all. I can feel my life-blood going—going—. Oh, God, what a death to die !” She felt her strength gradually failing. Her vision was becoming somewhat blurred, but still she could not remove her eyes from the horrid creature at her feet. She noticed now that his form was slowly changing. What had been the semblance of a man was growing into an enormous mosquito, bloated with human blood, and having a thousand voracious mouths fastened upon her bare, tender feet. With a last despairing effort, she gave one wild, wailing cry, and sank into unconsciousness.

“Christie, Christie ! what is the matter ?” called a voice at her door. She sat up in bed bathed in a cold perspiration, and trembling in every limb. The question had to be repeated before she could reply.

“Is it you, Aunt Virginia ?” she then asked. “Just wait a moment, and I’ll open the door.”

“What can be the matter, Christie ?” asked her aunt, when she was at last admitted. “I never heard

such a blood-curdling shriek. I thought some one must be murdering you."

"And so they were, auntie ; at least, I imagined they were, and that was just as bad for the time. I suppose I must have been dreaming. Come, sit down here, and I'll tell you all about it."

"Why, Christie, your hands are like ice. You poor child, you must have been badly frightened."

"Yes, I was, Aunt Virginia, and I feel as if I'm on the verge of hysterics still. But I want to tell you something. I think Uncle Lewis should know it. I wouldn't wake you, but since you are already here I can't let you go until I've told you."

She gave a succinct account of the scene she and Jack had witnessed, adding, that the state of excitement into which she had been thrown was doubtless the cause of her troubled dreams afterwards.

"Are you sure that you didn't dream the whole of it, Christie?" asked her aunt, half inclined to believe that this had been the case.

"No, no, Jack was with me,—ask him in the morning."

"Well, I'll tell your uncle at the first opportune moment. Meantime you must go to sleep or you'll be ill from all this excitement and wakefulness. There ! I'll lie beside you for a time, and you may feel secure from all danger."

It was not long until Mrs. Royston knew from her regular breathing that Christie was asleep. She then stole quietly down to her own room, leaving her niece to the enjoyment of her much needed rest.

CHAPTER II.

AN EPOCH IN JACK'S HISTORY.

WITH a start Christie awoke to find the sun shining broadly into her room, and, on consulting her watch, she found that it was nearly an hour later than that which usually found her at her self-assigned morning tasks. Hurriedly dressing herself, she hastened down stairs, looking a little shamefaced over her tardiness, for her grandmother had taught her to consider this an unpardonable offense unless under exceptional circumstances. The events of the preceding night might have been regarded as coming under this category, but Christie was accustomed to hold herself to strict account, and was always doubtful of those excuses that suggested themselves most readily to the ordinary mind. A smile stole over her face as she heard Jack's tuneful voice,—something between the croak of a frog and the squeak of a pig,—raised high in song.

“Dere vos von ole Tutchman, in Yhork Shtate he did live ;
He had von fine taughter you petter pelieve,
Her name vos Katrina, so fair as a rhoze,
An' she had von pig vort on de cend of her nhoze.”

So absorbed was he in admiration of his own performance, that for some moments she stood in the doorway unperceived by him. The chair on which he was seated was tilted at an alarming angle against the wall, and his bare, scrubby feet were stretched out on

another in front of him. A rather battered straw hat was planted squarely on the back of his head, and from beneath it escaped a tangled mass of hair shining like red gold in the morning sunshine. He was minus coat, vest, or cravat, one suspender hung loosely at his side, and his stubby hands, scarred in many an awkward conflict with knife, hammer and nails, were clasped behind his neck. Great freckles blotched his face, and his mouth seemed preternaturally large as he warbled forth his matutinal ditty. Jack was not a handsome boy,—I am fain to admit that fact, but, as Eb. Banks, one of their neighbors, was accustomed to say, “Ef he wur ugly, his ugly becomed him better’n ennybody’s he knowed.”

You could see why this was so, as, becoming conscious of Christie’s presence, he turned toward her his good-humored face. In the first place, he had very fine brown eyes,—eyes that could grow soft or fierce as the occasion might demand, but in which usually shone the mirth-provoking expression now lurking within them. There was the secret of his acknowledged popularity. You had but to look at him to feel an inclination to laugh. He literally shed good-humor from that round, moon-face of his upon every living creature about him. Like Mark Tapley, he was almost always “Jolly.”

“Hello, Chris!” he sang out, as if in continuation of his song, “An’ how did you sleep las’ night after the show?”

“Don’t ask me, Jack,” she answered, making a wry face, “I had a horrible time of it.”

“I heard you squeech out, an’ was jest a-goin’ to see whut was to pay when mother come to the door. The night-hosses had you, did they?”

"Yes they did, Jack; great, horrible, black ones, with eyes of fire and nostrils breathing out flames and smoke. You'd have screeched too if you had seen them. But, tell me, am I too late for breakfast?"

"No, we ain't had breakfus' yit, though it's high time we was a-havin' it. I'm as hungry as a wolf, an' was jest a-singin' to keep my courige up. It seems that mother, Aun' Dilsie, an' everybody on the place overslep' therselves this mornin'. I went out to the kitchen to see whut was the matter, an' there was Aun' Dilsie with her jaws all tied up in a red han'kercher, a-limpin' aroun' like as ef she couldn' hardly walk. She makes out like she's got the rheumatiz, bad, but it's my privit erpinion 'at she danced herself inter this fix las' night. I tole her as much, an' she ris the rollin'-pin on me an' give me to understan' ef I didn' clear out o' there I shouldn' have a mouthful o' breakfus' to-day. The ole lady gener'ly means whut she says, an' I concluded the bes' thing fur me to do was to scoot. Never min'! I'll fix her yit. I've set my pegs to have some ginger-cakes to-day, an' I know jest how to git her in a good humor. I'll fetch her the bigges', reddes', yaller-spotted han'kercher I can fin' down at the store, an' then you can see her grin from here to Novy Scoshy. It'll be 'honey' this, that an' t'other, an' I b'lieve in my soul she'd lay down on the groun' an' lemme walk right over her fur a little while. But," and his face darkened slightly at the thought, "I'll bet a thousan' she'll git some work out o' me berfo' the day's over. You dunno how many tricks she's got, Chris. It'll be, 'Now, honey, jes' yer run down ter de lot an' fetch aun' Dilsie er baskit o' corn cobs,' or, 'Jes' er few chips fum de

wood-pile, honey. Aun' Dilsie,—po' ole Aun' Dilsie, whut's ser cripple up wid der rheumatiz she ca' sca'cely drag one foot atter t'other,—she'll do es much fur yer when she git young, an' yer git ole an' stiff in de j'int's like her. Run erlong, dat's er man,' an' she'll jest open the stove door enough fur me to see and smell the cakes a little, a-lookin' as innercent as a lam' all the time, an' then she'll shet it with a bang as much as to say, 'Dat's de las' yer sees o' dem cakes, ole feller, 'tel de chips gits yere,' an' you better b'lieve I'll make tracks fast enough an' fetch 'em to her. She's a cunnin' ole fox, I tell you."

"I'm glad some one understands how to get work out of you, Jack. You are not over-fond of it, you know."

He gave her a reproachful look and was about to begin a vehement protest against what he considered such gross injustice, when he espied his father coming from the direction of the horse-lot.

"Hello!" he cried, "here comes the Gener'l in his war-paint an' feathers. He mus' be a-goin' to town to-day."

"Why necessarily to town?" asked his cousin.

"Have you been here this long, Christie, an' ain't learned yit whut that claw-hammer coat, two-story beaver, an' stunnin' collar an' kervat means? I measured that kervat onct, Chris, an' it's got more'n a square yard o' black silk in it. Aun' Dilsie swears he fetched all them things from Virginia an' ain't bought no new ones sence. Mother says the fur on the hat is gittin' awful thin, an' you can see where it's been stove in an' mended, but tain't no use to say nothin' to him; he's a-goin' to wear it as long as it'll hol' together."

But for Christie's extreme reverence for her uncle she could not have refrained from smiling at his antiquated appearance. Still she had to confess to a certain picturesqueness about it, further heightened by his erect carriage, refined features, and a stateliness of manner to be found only among those who, like himself, belonged to the "old school" of gentlemen. On seeing his niece he saluted her with grave courtesy; then, turning to Jack, he said mildly, "What, Jack, your toilet not made at so late an hour?"

"Why, I'm all dressed, father."

"Indeed! I think you have forgotten your coat, collar and cravat, to say nothing of your socks and shoes."

"Oh, father, it's so awful hot even to wear as much clothes as I've got on. I was a-readin' t'other day, about a feller 'at said he'd like to take off his flesh an' set in his bones. That's jest whut I'd like to do."

"Well, I suppose I will have to excuse you so far as the shoes and socks are concerned,—you are incorrigible in that respect,—but I insist upon your wearing a coat, at least, to the breakfast table. You must be on your guard, my son, or you will become as careless in your dress as some of our neighbors. They are good people—very good people, indeed,—but I could wish them somewhat different in this particular."

"But, father, you've often told me that the clothes don't make the man."

"Neither do they, but a gentleman owes it to himself, to say nothing of others, always to present a respectable appearance. His linen should be spotless, and his outer clothing free from soil."

Jack glanced down at his own and had the grace to blush. "All right, father, I'll go get my coat."

As "General" Royston,—he had once been general of militia and the title had clung to him as is usually the case in the South,—disappeared within the doorway, Jack said, "There's a martyr fur you, Christie. That coat's all wadded an' padded to make a nice fit, an' the Gener'l's a-goin' to swelter in it all day long, jest fur the sake o' looks. I don't see no sense in it, myself. Hello! here's Max all fixed up in his Sunday-go-to-meetin's, too. Whut's up, Max? I know all that finery don't stan' fur nothin'. He does look stunnin', don't he, Chris?"

Max colored painfully as her attention was thus directed to himself. Already feeling all a country boy's awkwardness at being "dressed up," his discomfort was not lessened by Jack's complimentary remarks. However, he had the proud consciousness of looking his best. His hair had been soaped and soaked in bear's oil until it stood up at what he considered just the proper angle, his collar was so tall and stiff he had, perforce, to preserve a very dignified demeanor, and his cravat was the perfection of taste; of this fact he was assured, for he had tried at least a dozen before he was satisfied with the effect. A coral pin was stuck carelessly but artistically into its folds, and a set of coral studs adorned the immaculate shirt-bosom. His coat was buttoned up so as to display his fine figure to the best advantage, and out of a side-pocket peeped the edge of a snowy handkerchief redolent of heliotrope, which he considered the most delightful of perfumes. His boots shone like ebony mirrors, and his trowsers,—ah, therein lay the chief glory of his matchless toilet. So striped and barred

were they, that the eye was lost in a maze in the effort to trace the intricacies of the pattern, and they were the very latest style, for had not Adolph Meyer asseverated that fact until he was black and blue in the face at the time of the purchase? This had been on his last visit to Santa Rita, and he had been extremely careful in the selection, for it was with a view of pleasing the fastidious taste of a certain young lady who, but for the fact that she was his cousin, would long ago have been made aware of the admiration she had excited within his susceptible breast. But Max had heard her assert, on more than one occasion, her disapproval of the marriage of such near relations, so he contented himself for the present with the bestowal of such languishing looks as he thought must eventually soften the most obdurate heart. There was a striking resemblance between them as they stood together in the doorway,—Christie's face being a softer reflection of her cousin's. Both were eminently handsome.

"I'm going to Milton on business for father," he said, in reply to Jack's inquiries, "and it may be late before I get back. It's so warm now, I think I'll take advantage of the moonlight and return after sunset."

At this moment the welcome summons to breakfast was heard, and Jack scrambled up-stairs after his coat. He went up on all-fours, and came down sliding on the banisters. His father looked a mild reproof for such undignified behavior, but said nothing; and his mother, a refined, delicate-looking lady, only shook her head and sighed wearily. She had not the physical strength to cope with Jack's young sturdiness, and had long ago given him over to the error of his ways.

"It all comes of his having been born in Texas,"

she would sometimes say to Christie. "He's as different as possible from my elder children,—as different as Virginia and Texas,"—this, in a tone that implied a great deal, and evidently not in favor of the latter. Christie thought her uncle looked a shade graver than usual as they sat at breakfast, and she wondered if her aunt had told him of the startling proceedings of the negroes during the night. No allusion was made to them, however, and the meal passed as usual,—quietly, except for the side-play between Jack and his little sister Virginia, which elicited a gentle remonstrance from his mother.

"Mr. Linton's at the gate a-wantin' ter see yer, Marster," said Mollie, the housemaid, "an' he says kin yer come right erway."

They were already rising from the table when the message was brought, and Christie, following her uncle soon afterward into the hall, heard Mr. Linton say, "I'm sorry to trouble you to come to me, General, but I hadn't the time to go to you. I have something important to tell you."

His voice was then lowered so that she caught nothing more, and, thinking it something she should not hear, she turned away and began her usual morning duties. Presently her uncle returned and said, "Something has occurred, Virginia, that will prevent my going to Santa Rita as I had intended. Still, my business there should not be postponed. And it is equally important that Max should go to Milton," he continued, musingly. "Jack," after some moments' reflection, "I believe I'll write a note to Judge Roy, and you can carry it for me. Yes, that will be my best plan, I think."

Jack's eyes glistened. Never had he been allowed

to go to town alone ; in fact, he had been there only a few times in all his life. "Certainly, father," he answered, briskly ; "an' anything you want 'tended to, jest let me know." He felt that he had already grown an inch or two taller. He was literally swelling with importance.

"Very well, bring out Fire-fly,—or no, you'd better not take him,—you might not get back in time for Christie's ride ; and, anyway, he'd be too jaded. And I shall want Dapple for myself. I think, Jack, you must content yourself with one of the mules to-day."

"All right, father," but his countenance fell considerably, nevertheless. "I'll take Little Simon. He's the fastest trotter amongst 'em."

"Only be careful ; Little Simon must be watched. He is very treacherous."

"I ain't a bit skeered of him," said Jack, confidently.

"I dare say not. There lies the danger."

Just before his departure, Jack came to Christie with a rueful face. "Christie, do please tie this everlastin' kervat fur me. I b'lieve the thing's 'witched, anyhow. It jest slips an' slides every way but the right one. Whut's the use o' the things, I'd like to know ? It's my b'lief 'at they was jest made to plague a feller's life out of him."

"There ! that will do nicely," she said, bending down and kissing him on the forehead, as she gave the final touch to the rebellious cravat. "You don't know how much better you look. Why, Jack, my man, you are positively handsome."

"Maybe I do look better," said Jack, stealing a sidelong glance at the nearest mirror, "but I don't feel better, I can tell you. How I'm ever a-goin' to

stan' it bein' geared up this-a-way all this hot day, I can't see. My feet feel like they had ten pounds o' lead apiece hitched to 'em, an' these boots screech so 'at you can hear 'em a mile off."

"Oh, well, but you must be willing to endure something for the sake of respectability. We can't always do just as is most convenient or agreeable to ourselves, you know. We owe certain duties to society that cannot be shirked."

"Fur goodness' sake, don't you go to preachin', Chris. I hear enough o' that from father an' mother, an' Max hol's forth sometimes by the hour; but when he begins, I gener'ly stick my fingers in my yeers, an' whistle as loud as I can, so it don't make much difference."

"He's a regular Texas hoosier, Christie; it's no use to say anything to him," said Mrs. Royston, who had entered the room in time to hear his latest speech. "I tell the General it all comes from his association with that Eb. Banks. He hunts so much with him, you know. I disapprove of the intimacy, but his father says that in spite of his uncouth manners and appearance, Mr. Banks is at heart a gentleman, and that the boy cannot really be injured by it."

"You darlin' ole mammy," said Jack, throwing his arm around his mother's neck and boisterously kissing her, "of course he can't. You're always fin'in' bugerboos, mother. What harm can Eb. Banks do me, I'd like to know? Why, he's jest one o' the best-hearted fellers in the world."

"I don't doubt that, but all the same, I don't consider him the best of companions for you," she returned, quietly disengaging herself from his bear-like embrace.

"Well, it's high time I was a-goin' I'm a-thinkin'. Where's the saddle bags? Oh, here they are. Good-by; I'm off."

"Jack, Jack," called Virginia, "don't forget to bring me that somethin' nice you promised me."

"I won't, Ginny. I've got a bright new silver half-a-dollar, an' I'll hunt the town over, but whut I'll fetch you somethin' you'll like."

"Don't get candy,—I'm tired o' that; an' o' raisins an' almon's an' all them too."

"Don't you fret. I'll fin' somethin'," he answered confidently, as, having thrown the bags across the Spanish saddle, gay with its shining, brass-headed nails, he mounted his long-eared steed. A smart stroke of the long supple switch with which he had provided himself, a few rebellious movements on the part of Little Simon, and he was off at a pace that promised a speedy termination of his journey. His mother looked after him with an amused but sad smile.

"What am I ever to do with him, Christie? I fear I can never make a gentleman of him, especially with his present surroundings."

"Don't fear for him, Aunt Virginia. He may be always as he is now,—a diamond in the rough, but a true diamond nevertheless. While not brilliant, he has a fund of strong common sense that will never fail him. Indeed, I don't know if he's not exactly suited to the conditions under which he must live should he always remain here. Perhaps nature had an eye to this fact when she created him what he is,—so different, as you say, from all the Roystons who have gone before him."

"Well, well, I'm glad you view the matter so hope-

fully. I confess Jack's too much for me; I cannot manage him."

"He'll manage himself—and in the right way, too; you'll see. So, smooth out those ugly wrinkles, auntie, mine; they're not a bit becoming to you. Just set your heart at rest so far as Jack is concerned."

As she spoke, she passed her hand gently over her aunt's forehead and then stooped to kiss her. In spite of the disparity of age, this tall young girl often assumed the role of protectress to the frail, nervous elder lady, who, on her part, felt Christie's stronger nature to be just what was needed to smooth over the rough ways of life for her. Her own elder daughter was married and living in a distant county, and she was very grateful to her niece for so fully supplying her place. She now took up her sewing and Christie knew by the energetic manner in which she drew the needle back and forth, that she had been inspired with new hope and courage as to her son's future. Meantime, Jack, the object of so much motherly solicitude, was pursuing his way to Santa Rita, all his thoughts and energies bent upon the momentous journey before him. When a sufficient distance from home to escape observation, he stopped, drew out from his saddle-bags a pair of huge Mexican spurs with tiny silver bells attached, and strapped them securely about his boots. The tinkling of these bells was sweetest music in his ears, and he turned his feet about in every direction to make them jingle more loudly, gazing at them, meanwhile, in rapt admiration. After a time, however, he became conscious of a certain bodily discomfort that threatened to destroy all his pleasure in his pedal finery. "Thunderation!" he

ejaculated, "how awful hot it is. I feel like I'm a-goin' to choke, an' my feet are jest a-burnin' up."

After some moments' reflection, he paused, removed his boots and socks, and, having fastened the spurs to his bare feet, stuffed those superfluous articles of his toilet into the saddle-bags, and rode on. Presently he again stopped; "It jest ain't no use a-talkin',—I can't stan' it no longer. I can't help it ef Christie does think I look better this-a-way. I'm a-goin' to take off all this toggery an' put 'em in my saddle-bags. I can put 'em on agin jest berfo' I git to town." No sooner said than done. Off went the coat, vest, collar and cravat, to be wadded into the saddle-bags along with the boots and socks. Unbuttoning his shirt, he laid bare his chest, and drew a long, deep breath of relief. "They may all do jest as they please about it," he muttered, "but here's one 'at'll never kill hisself nor roast hisself alive nother, jest fur the sake o' looks. I don' see no sense in it, nohow."

Having thus relieved both body and mind, he remounted his mule, and rode on with a lightened heart. As he plunged into the gloomy depths of Wolf creek bottom, he again called a halt. "Here's where the wolf snapped at Mat Banks that time. I reckon it's about time I was a-bringin' out ole Peter." Suiting the action to the word, he drew out the ancient p'stol—one of his most tenderly-cherished possessions. He took it out of the holster, shut one eye while he examined it critically with the other, and then replacing it, strapped the belt to which it was attached about his waist. "Ef anything tries to hurt me now, 'twon't be good fur their health," was

his mental comment, as he again continued his journey.

Wolf creek and its dangers were almost safely passed, when, in his eager scrutiny of the woods, he forgot his spurs which he had hitherto been careful to keep at a respectful distance from Little Simon's flanks. The sudden rush of some animal in the woods so startled him that, ere he was aware, the great rowels were clamped against the sides of the mule. Thereupon ensued a series of gymnastics on the part of his steed, such as could not have been excelled for vigor and agility. Jack was tossed about like a rubber ball, landing now in front, now in rear of his saddle, but he was not thrown off. He could ride like a monkey, and Little Simon, becoming convinced after a time that he could not rid himself of his burden, concluded to make the best of an unpleasant predicament, and gradually subsided into calmness.

"Hello, Jack ! havin' a sort ov a scrimmage weth Little Simun, air ye ? I thought onct ye wur a goner, shore, but ye fanned him out at las', an' a good thing fur him, too."

"Why, Mat, how are you ? I'm glad to see you," said Jack, still panting from his labors. "Yes, I've had a awful tussle with Little Simon. I feel like breakin' every bone in his body,—plague take him,—but I whupped him out, an' I reckon there won't be no more cuttin' up to-day. The wust of it is I'm splashed with mud from top to toe, an' I've got to go to town this-a-way."

"Oh, that don' make no diffunce," said Mat. "I don't keer a butt'n whut them town-folks thinks. They'll turn up their noses at country folks ennyhow,

an' it's thes es well ter let 'em have somepen ter turn 'em up fur."

Jack was glad to snatch at any straw of comfort and there was something consolatory in Mat's view of the matter, so he decided to adopt it as his own. Soon all thought of his personal appearance was forgotten in the absorbing pleasure of "swapping" knives, marbles, &c., with Mat. After sundry business transactions of this important nature, during which certain pieces of property had several times changed hands, he found himself minns a six-bladed knife and the owner of a curiously twisted and plaited horse-hair whip called, by Mat, a "quirt," the possession of which had long been the chief desire of his heart. They were in the midst of the town before he realized the fact.

"Oh, Mat, I'd intended to put on my coat an boots berfo' I got to town. I think I'd better go back an' do it, yit."

"Whut fur?" asked Mat, disdainfully. "I ain't got on nary one, an' I'll feel thes es good es ary town chap we'll see ter-day. I don' keer a straw fur ther laughin' at me. I know I've got more sense in a minit 'n they've got in a whole year with all ther fine cloc's an' big gol' chains."

"Whut'll Christie think?" Jack mentally asked himself, but then he reflected that she need never know. Mat "would'n never tell on him," he knew, "an' it'd be a awful bother to go way back, an' so awful hot with 'em on, too," so he listened to the voice of the tempter and yielded to his inclinations. Mat had not told him that his face as well as his clothes was splashed with mud, and it must be confessed that he presented rather a comical sight to the groups of

people standing about the square. However, the good folks of Santa Rita were too well accustomed to eccentric styles of dress to give him more than a passing notice.

Having agreed with Mat that they should ride home together, he inquired the way to Judge Roy's office and proceeded thither at once. When he took out the coat to get the note his father had written, it occurred to him that he would put it on, but it was such a mass of wrinkles that he stuffed it back into his saddle-bags. So, with spurs jingling musically at every step, he entered the office and handed the note to the lawyer. That gentleman read it in silence and wrote another in reply. Folding it, he said, "I suppose I can get you to carry my answer to the General. You live in his neighborhood, do you not?"

"I'm his son, sir."

Such a look of astonishment made itself visible on his face that even Jack could not fail to see it. He blushed to the roots of his hair.

"I know whut you're a-thinkin', sir. You're a wonderin' how sech a gentleman as my father could have sech a skeer-crow of a son. I ain't got much beauty to boast of at the best, but I do look a little better when I'm fixed up. An' I was fixed up when I started from home, but it was so awful hot I couldn't keep on my coat an' boots. An' then Little Simon took it inter his head to git awful mad 'cause my spurs happened to tech him in the flank, an' he kicked aroun' in a mud-puddle tel he splattered me from head to foot."

"But why do you wear that pistol and those spurs, my boy?" asked Judge Roy, a smile of amusement playing over his face.

"Why do I wear my pistol?" said Jack, in amazement. "Why, everybody wears 'em in Texas."

"That's true,—too true," sighed he. "But the spurs, young man?"

"Well, sir, ef ever you rode a mule, all I've got to say is you won't ask me twict whut I wear spurs fur."

"I see you can defend yourself," said the old gentleman, laughing. "You should be a special pleader."

Jack had no idea what this meant, but he was sure it was something complimentary, so he left the office with his respect for lawyers in general, and for Judge Roy in particular, greatly augmented. Having heard Eb. Banks speak so slightly of them as a class, he also had come to regard them with some contempt. The next most important matter was to get the "somethin' nice" for Virginia. He made his way to the confectioner's shop, the situation of which he did not need to inquire. As he entered, the proprietor, a burly German, stood behind the counter, alternately wiping his forehead with a silk handkerchief, prodigious in size and splendor of color, and flicking away the flies from some sweetmeats that stood near.

"Vell, vot vill you hafe, my poy?" he asked, coming forward as he saw Jack standing irresolutely near the door.

"I don't know, Mr. Hirsch, whut I do want, but I promused my little sister to bring her somethin' nice, an' I knowed here was the place to git it."

"Dot's right, my son, dot's right. Dis ish de plache. Candy?" laying his hand on a jar of peppermint drops.

"No, sir, she's tired o' that, an' she don't want raisins nor almon's nor nothin' o' that sort."

He raised his hat and scratched his head in his perplexity. "I'll jest be switched ef I know whut to git."

"How vould someting to trink shuit you?"

"Whut have you got?"

"Vell, dere's de lager."

"Is it nice?"

"Oh, yes, dere's noting petter."

"But whut is it?"

"Peer, poy, peer."

Jack sniffed contemptuously. "No, no beer fur me,—we can make plenty o' that at home."

"Vell, den, dere's ale, borter, shingher bop—"

"Which is the nicest."

"Vell, I dinks I dakes de ale."

"All right. Trot her out, and here's your pay," chucking the half-dollar across the counter. "You're right shore it's nice?" he said, wistfully eying the bottle as he took it up.

Mr. Hirsch made a sound with his lips as if taking an imaginary draught of the boasted liquor. "You petter pelieve," he said, winking with his left eye and shrugging his right shoulder.

Jack still stood in some hesitation. The investment of that half-dollar was a matter of as much importance to him as if it had been millions. At this moment, there appeared in the doorway such a fairy vision as had never before greeted his eyes. There stood a little, blue-robed maiden with eyes as bright as stars, cheeks like a peach, cherry-red lips, and a profusion of glossy black ringlets floating about her shoulders.

Jack gazed at her with suspended breath, his lips falling apart until he looked like an idiot, his very soul steeped in admiration as he took in the whole lovely picture, from the little blue parasol hanging over the jaunty hat with its fluffy, creamy feathers and masses of soft white lace, to the tiny feet encased in the daintiest of blue boots. "Is she alive?" was the question that occurred to him, but his doubts on that score were soon set at rest as she approached the counter and asked in a sweet, bird-like voice for some jujube paste. He lingered while Mr. Hirsch tied up the parcel. He could not tear his eyes from the beautiful apparition.

As she turned away from the counter she accidentally dropped her handkerchief. Jack sprang forward to pick it up, but in doing so awkwardly stumbled over a chair and came near to falling. This set his spurs to jingling, and it was with a very red face that he handed it to her. As he did so, he chanced to touch the little fingers in the delicate blue kid gloves, and he felt a tingling of his blood which sent a delightful thrill through every vein. He staggered as though he had been drinking wine, and, in the effort to turn away, struck her arm so that the package of candy fell to the floor.

"Oh, that was too bad," he said, speaking for the first time, as he stooped to get it for her. "I was very awkward."

She thanked him sweetly, and was about to go when he burst out, "I say, that's too heavy fur you, anyhow. Won't you lemme take it home fur you?"

She scanned him from head to foot. "How much will you charge me?" He flushed painfully.

"Nothin', of course," he answered, unable to repress the signs of his mortification.

She shook her head. "Then I don't think I can let you do it."

"Why? I've got plenty o' time," said he, eagerly.

"'Cause,"—and she stopped.

"'Cause whut? Please tell me. I'd like so much to do it fur you."

"I'm afraid you wouldn't like it if I was to tell you why."

"Oh, no, I couldn' git mad with you,"—this very tenderly.

"Well then, I'm afraid mamma wouldn't like me to be seen on the street with such a looking boy. You don't know how funny you do look!" and she burst into a merry laugh.

Jack looked down at himself, and again the hot blushes crimsoned his cheeks. He knew she was right,—and, on consideration, he could not blame her. He wondered how he could ever have had the audacity to propose such a thing. He handed the package of candy to her without a word.

"You are not mad with me?" she asked, looking up at him wistfully. "You can take it home for me," with sudden desperation. "I don't care if they do laugh at us." There was a divine compassion in the dark eyes, now grown suddenly tender with the soft mist that had overspread them.

"No," said he, humbly, "I musn' go with you. I'm not fit, but if you'll tell me the way to your house I'll take it fur you, an' save you the trouble."

"I can't let you do that. I must go now. Mamma will be wondering what has become of me."

She thanked him for his intended kindness, and

bade him good-morning. He gazed after her as the little blue boots went twinkling down the street. He was roused by a smart slap on his shoulder from Mr. Hirsch.

"Vell, Zhack, my poy, sthruck, ish you?"

"Who is she, Mr. Hirsch?"

"Vot, you ton't know de leetle peauty? I tought you vas ole acquaintance. She's Chudge Rhoys dochter, an' she life in dot pig fine house ofer dere."

Jack felt a sudden desire to inspect the Judge's residence more closely, and was soon on his way toward it, with the little blue angel floating in the distance ahead of him. "Ketch me ever comin' to town agin 'uthout my store-clothes on," he muttered to himself, as he trudged along with the bottle of ale held in a fierce embrace. He followed until he saw her disappear within the doorway of her home, and then, as in a dream, retraced his steps to the square. His lips were tightly compressed, and he walked with a firm manly tread that set the spurs to jingling more loudly than ever. Shaking his clenched fist in the air, he said from between his set teeth, "One o' these days she'll be proud to be seen a-walkin' with me."

As he emerged into the square, there came a great clatter of hoofs from one of the streets leading to it. A moment later, two horses came tearing into view, panting, foaming, and trembling as if ready to drop from fatigue. One of the riders was a man, dressed in coarse, home-spun clothes, and in the belt about his waist was stuck a Colt's revolver, two small der-ringer pistols, and a formidable-looking bowie-knife. The other was a woman, whose features were concealed by a huge sun-bonnet, the skirt of which was flapping wildly about her head, as she rushed madly forward.

A dress of purple calico, whose scant draperies displayed her stockingless limbs and heavy rough shoes to advantage, completed her toilet. They stopped at the fence surrounding the court-house. The man was off his horse in an instant.

"Ye go git the jestice while I'm a-gittin' ov the license, Tildy," he panted, as he turned away.

"Hello, whut's up, Bill?"

"Ye go an' help Tildy ter fin' the jestice, that's a good boy, Tim. I'll bless you ter my dyin' day, ef yer will."

"But whut's ter pay?"

"The Devil's ter pay, that's all. Ole man Nixon an' his son, Cal, is atter us hot an' heavy, an' I'm afeard they'll git here afore we kin git the knot tied ter save our lives."

"Hooray, Bill! Bully fur ye! Run git the license, an' I'll have 'Square Rogers here afore ye kin turn aroun'. Hooray, I say!" he shouted, waving his hat in the air, as he ran in quest of the officer of the law. In a few moments, every one around the square knew what was going on, and all were crowding about the doors of the buildings to watch the proceedings. Bill Potter soon returned with the legal document necessary to the execution of his design, and, remounting his horse, took his place by the side of his intended bride. Presently his friend, Tim, was seen dragging Squire Rogers after him, almost choking the old gentleman, so fierce was his hold upon the collar of his coat.

"Where—where will you be married?" gasped that officer, when he could recover his breath.

"Right here," answered Bill, grimly.

"Not on horseback?"

"Yes, sir, here or nowhar. I want ter be ready ter scoot the minit hit's over."

By this time a great crowd had gathered about them, and in the presence of these self-appointed witnesses, the two were made one. Scarcely had the final, solemn words been spoken when again the sound of horses' hoofs was heard approaching rapidly.

"Cl'ar the track, boys!" cried Bill, excitedly. "Here we go! Give my bes' respec's ter ole man Nixon an' Cal," and they were off, Bill flapping his arms and crowing like a victorious cock as they went. Almost immediately there was a sudden dispersion of the curious sight-seers about the court-house as a shower of bird-shot came rattling among them. Jack was standing next to Sol Levy, a queer-looking, monkey-like little man who now clapped his hands to his back and capered wildly about, wailing dismally, "Oh, I'm shoot, I'm shoot all ofer!" Jack felt his own body and limbs to make sure that the same was not the case with himself, but, to his great relief, discovered that no damage had been done. The wounded man was taken in charge by some of the by-standers, and, upon examination, his back was found to be well peppered with bird-shot. Meantime, the irate father and his son had been arrested and carried off to jail, thus insuring the escape of the newly-married pair. The whole procedure had, as we may well imagine, been witnessed with the utmost interest by Jack, but throughout he had held on manfully to his bottle.

As the excitement subsided, he concluded it was time to look up Mat Banks and return home. This was soon done, and the two boys eagerly discussed the matter as they rode along together. Mat's sympathies

were wholly with the happy Benedict, but Jack thought the father of the bride had a right to be considered as well. "I'll never have a wife ef I have to steal her," he said. "I'd be 'fraid 'at a girl who'd treat her father an' mother so mean as to run off from 'em might be jest as mean to me."

"An' I wouldn' have no woman in the worl' 'at wouldn' be ready ter run away weth me the minit I said the word," responded Mat.

"Well, every feller has a right to his own way o' thinkin', I s'pose," sagely replied Jack.

The subject of marriage was, in truth, one that he had never before considered, but his innate sense of honor revolted at the manner of Bill Potter's. At thought of his having a wife, his cheeks flushed guiltily as he recalled the vision of the blue-robed seraph, and then his heart sunk within him as he realized the immeasurable distance between them. Never mind! the future was all before him, and stranger things had happened.

"Did ye hear anything about the niggers a-risin', Jack?" asked Mat after they had exhausted the prolific theme of the elopement.

"No, did you?"

"Yes, they say ther's somethin' o' the sort a-goin' on, an' 'at the folks is a-takin' up niggers like the mischeef down aroun' Milton."

"Why, Max is gone there to-day, an' I reckon he can tell us all about it when he comes back. But I don't b'lieve it's so, do you?"

"No, I don't. I don't b'lieve the niggers is sech blamed fools es that'd make 'em out ter be."

After a long hot ride, during which the ale was so well shaken up, that it had grown impatient of its

confinement in the bottle, Jack arrived at home. He had taken the precaution to conceal his spurs and pistol in the saddle-bags some time before. That was his own little secret which he knew Mat would keep inviolate. As he alighted at the gate, he saw "Parson" Nicholls seated in the hall talking with his father.

"Whut's that ole long-winded feller a-doin' here, I wonder?" muttered Jack. "He never knows when to stop a-talkin' nor a-preachin' nuther."

He saluted the reverend gentleman very respectfully, however, as he handed the note to his father. Then he hurried at once into the dining-room with his saddle-bags.

"Ginny, Christie," he called, "run here. I've got the nicest thing fur you 'at you ever seen."

Christie was busy and was rather slow in coming, but Ginny eagerly obeyed the summons. Just as the former reached the door, she heard a tremendous explosion followed by an inexplicable, sizzling sound. Jack and his sister were standing near the table, staring blankly at a bottle upon it from which the foaming liquor was rapidly escaping. Christie comprehended the situation at once, and was about to advance to the rescue when the Parson, who had been seated opposite the open door, forestalled her. He stopped in the midst of one of his perorations, and, with a liveliness of movement not to be expected from one of his age and calling, reached the table, caught up the bottle, and, placing it to his mouth, drained it of its contents. Setting it down at the close of this performance, he lustily smacked his lips and wiped them with his bandana handkerchief.

"Eh-h-h-h!" he said, clearing his throat and still smacking his lips, "I a'int had sech a dram es that in

a month o' Sundays. I wouldn' a-drunk hit, childern, on'y I seed you wus a-goin ter let hit all waste, anyhow."

Jack's face was a study. His mouth quivered and he turned on his heel and left the room. Great tears had come into Ginny's eyes, but she bravely kept them there. She would not be silly enough to cry, she thought, but it was too bad after Jack had brought it, —whatever it was,—all the way from town for her. And he had spent that bright silver half-dollar for it, too. But he felt worse about it than she did, she knew, and she would pretend to him that she did not mind the loss.

The worthy Parson, returning to his seat, took up the thread of his discourse where he had left off just as though nothing had happened to interrupt him. He proceeded to enlighten General Royston upon certain knotty questions connected with his own faith. "But," he finally wound up, "atter all, Giner'l, we Hard-shells don't bother ourselves much erbout no sort o' doctring. Ef a man work an' try ter make a livin' fur his fam'ly, an' al'ays pay his hones' debts, an' don't steal nor nothin', then he's got a riligion 'at's plum good ernough fur me. I kin look over his takin' a leetle too much liquor ercashunerly, an' I don' b'lieve the good Lord'll hol' him ercounterable fur it nuther ef he do all them t'other things I've been a-talkin' erbout." General Royston agreed with him so far as the debts were concerned, but could not coincide with his views as to the whiskey. Then they talked in low tones of the reported disturbances among the negroes.

"I have said nothing as yet to my wife and niece," said General Royston. "I do not wish to alarm them

needlessly, but I apprehend some danger. I haven't liked the looks of things lately."

Meantime, Christie followed Jack, whom she found out in the yard executing a regular war-dance to work off the indignation with which his whole being was surcharged.

"I'll pay him fur that mean trick,—see ef I don't!" he cried.

"But, Jack, it was all wasting, anyway. Why didn't you stop it?"

"How in the thunder did I know it'd do that-away, Chris? An' when the thing shot off, I thought it was a pistol or somethin', an' I didn' have no sense fur a little while."

By degrees she succeeded in reconciling him to his loss, and then he remembered to tell her, "Oh, Christie, I seen Mr. Bradford down at the store, an' he tole me to tell you he'd be here at five o'clock, sharp."

"Very well; you'll have Fire-fly ready for me, won't you?"

"Of course; but I say, I want some dinner. I'm as hungry as a bear."

She soon had a nice lunch ready for him, and while he was devouring it, he was very voluble in his descriptions of all he had seen and heard that day,—of all except the vision of the blue fairy; of that he said not a word.

CHAPTER III.

A RESCUE.

PROMPTLY at five o'clock, Jack went to Christie's room with the announcement that Fire fly was ready and Mr. Bradford awaiting her in the parlor.

"Hoop-de-doodle, you do look stunnin', Chris!" he exclaimed, as soon as he caught sight of her. "You mus' be a-settin' your cap fur Mr. Bradford. Don't you go to breakin' the po' feller's heart now."

"What do you know about breaking hearts?" she asked lightly, but a faint flush stole into her cheeks and remained, an added charm to the sweet face. She was indeed very lovely in her dark-blue riding-habit, with a line of snowy linen about the white throat, and the natty velvet cap just suited to her statuesque style of beauty. A creamy complexion, with the daintiest suggestion of rose in the cheeks, a noble forehead, a tender mouth, liquid brown eyes, and a mass of rippling hair of the same warm hue wound into a simple Greek coil at the back of a head severely classical in its outlines, made up a *tout ensemble* which quite justified Jack's admiration.

But it was not merely the physical loveliness of Christabel Royston that one chiefly admired after coming to know her inner nature. You could not be long in her presence without receiving the impression that under her calm exterior was concealed a force of character which, latent hitherto, would always prove equal to any emergency that might arise in her life.

She might not always act wisely, but it would be in accordance with the dictates of a carefully trained conscience. Whatever its behests, however antagonistic to the conventionalities of society, she must obey, or suffer the pangs which loss of self-respect must always bring to the truly noble. An awkward and inconvenient appendage she had sometimes found this exacting conscience to be, but never yet had she dared to disobey its commands, save, perhaps, in the one matter of yielding seeming acquiescence in the existence of slavery, when she honestly and conscientiously believed it to be wrong. In this, however, we cannot judge her severely. She felt her own powerlessness to remedy the wrong, and, indeed, saw no way out of the labyrinth of evils it had entailed upon her section of the country. She was uniformly kind to the servants, doing all in her power to render less irksome the condition to which fate had assigned them. Much useless sympathy, indeed, had she expended upon them, regarding as a humiliation many things which the habits of a life-time had taught them to look upon with apathetic indifference.

Often had she been led to wonder at their lightness of heart,—the gay *insouciance* with which they threw off all care for the future, or regret for what she felt to be a degrading position. Latterly, however, she had noticed in the faces of those of her aunt's household a look of expectancy,—an expression of mingled fear and exultation, which had at first excited her curiosity, and afterwards given rise to a vague alarm. For some months now, the thrum of the banjo and the rhythm of dancing feet had ceased to be heard from the quarters. In their stead came the sound of wailing hymns, loud and long petitions to a

Deity of whom I sadly fear they had only an indistinct idea, and the triumphant shouts of "Chreeschuns," mingled with the dismal groans and cries of the unconverted. One thing Christie had observed,—that these exercises had invariably ended with the singing of the hymn, "The year of jubilee is come," in which all, old and young, saint and sinner, alike joined, until such a volume of sound arose as must have deafened the ear of the listening night. All these things had weighed upon her mind until she had become possessed of a constant, haunting fear which she could not shake off. She forgot it momentarily, however, as, drawing on her heavy riding-gloves, she caught up her whip and accompanied Jack down-stairs.

"I haven't kept you waiting, have I?" she said to a tall, dark young man who came forward to meet her as she entered the parlor.

"No, I think with Parson Johnson that you are 'a model of punctuality.'"

"Oh, did you hear that?" cried Jack gleefully. "I'm so glad, fur Christie wouldn' lemme tell it at home, an' I've been jest a-dyin' to let it out. You see me an' her was the only ones at meetin' that day. Chris purten's she don't like the pars'n's payin' her that compliment right out o' the pulpit berfo' all the folks, but it's my b'lief 'at she hired the ole man to do it. She's mighty sugary with him when he's here, I tell you, an' she knit him that flamin' red choker you've seen him wear. She's jest as sly as she can be, Mr. Bradford. Don't you trust her too fur."

Felix Bradford laughed as he saw the swift blushes pass over her face, but she gaily replied, "Never mind, master Jack, I'll have him to denounce you as the greatest reprobate in all the land the very next

time he preaches here. And," turning to Mr. Bradford, "what about the 'learned Professor' who bribed this same reverend gentleman to advertise his capabilities as a teacher 'in the meetin', as Jack would say?"

"Were you there that day? It was too ridiculous—together a novel proceeding to me. I scarcely knew whether to rise and thank him for his high appreciation of my excellent qualities, or to hide my modest blushes under the bench on which I was seated. Queer ideas you Texans seem to have of the sanctity of a church, Jack."

"Oh, but it's not a regular church, you know," said Christie. "It's only the academy building used in that capacity on Sundays."

"And that, you think, accounts for, and perhaps excuses, the occasional creeping in of secular matters such as Parson Nicholls having 'a few more o' them grin' stones ter sell,' do you?"

"I'm not defending either him or Mr. Johnson,—I'm simply stating facts. I was brought up an Episcopalian, you remember, and the religious customs here,—particularly the use of an unconsecrated building for sacred services by the various denominations on alternate Sundays, seemed very odd to me at first."

"So it did to me, but, do you know, I have grown rather to like it. I notice all go to hear the ministers of the different sects. This common use of one building seems to have drawn the people together, begetting a religious tolerance which might not otherwise have existed. And as for the house not having been consecrated, surely God is everywhere. All places must be alike holy to Him. Everything depends upon the spirit in which we approach Him."

"I'm glad you can say so much in favor of Texas customs. See how eagerly Jack listens to you. Had you dared to indulge in the slightest stricture upon them, he would have been ready on the instant to do battle for his native state."

"I wouldn't min' anything Mr. Bradford might say about it," said Jack looking up affectionately into his teacher's face.

"Thanks, Jack, for your confidence in me," he returned, more touched than he allowed to appear. "I wish every one would trust me as you do," and a troubled look stole into his face.

"I know," said Jack. "You're a-thinkin' o' them 'at's always a-talkin' about your bein' a Yankee. As ef you could help bein' born north o' Mas'n's an' Dix'n's line. I know you wouldn't a-been ef you could a-had your way about it."

"You think that important event would have taken place in Texas if I could have had the ordering of things, do you, Jack? I don't know about that. Texas is a great state, but I must confess to a strong affection for Massachusetts also. I am not ashamed of the land of my birth."

"Massachusetts! Ain't that where they say the wooden nutmegs comes from?"

"They say a great many things of us, my boy, which it seems useless to deny whether they are true or not. But, come, Miss Royston, I see that our horses are impatient to be off. I believe I am falling into your pleasant southern habits. In my country we do not loiter when a thing is to be done. I am beginning to think we make too much a business of pleasure."

"If we could only strike a happy medium between

your New Englander's restless energy, and the Texan's happy-go-lucky way of letting things take care of themselves, it seems to me we would have found the golden mean that would produce a steady industry free from the feverishness which is apt to be the result of the one, and the deadly asphyxia which paralyzes all effort in the other," said Christie as they walked out to the gate.

"You should have it in Virginia, for it is just midway between the two extremes of climate."

She shook her head. "No, we need an infusion of newer and more stirring elements among us. We are too well content to live as our fore-fathers have done. There's more hope of progress here in this wild new country than in our older state. In each we have the clog of slavery which hinders all advancement."

"Yes." It was expressive only of acquiescence in what she had said. The question was one that he seldom discussed. "There is another obstacle also in the very geniality of the climate and the fertility of the soil. A man can earn a living too easily; nature is too kind. Half the energy of our New England people is due to the fact that they have so many difficulties to overcome in the bleakness of the climate and the sterility of much of the soil. As each one is encountered and conquered new strength is developed for the grappling with others. Believe me, this school of necessity, if severe in its discipline, is what is required to produce the highest type of manhood. We seldom put forth our best energies until forced to do so by some outside pressure brought to bear upon us."

"I believe you are right," she answered thoughtfully.

Jack watched them as they mounted their horses and rode away. "Mr. Bradford's learned to ride as well as anybody," was his mental comment. "I knowed he would when I seen him keep a-tryin' after Dare-devil kerflumuxed him that day. I b'lieve he could do anything he'd set his head to. Him an' Christie'd make a mighty strong team ef they'd jest take a notion to pull together. I wish to goodness they would; then, maybe, we'd have her to live here by us all the time."

What had come over Jack? Only two days ago such a suggestion would have made him furiously jealous of his teacher. Was it that he loved Christie less, or that the blue fairy had awakened him to a realization of the true nature of his affection for her?

"In which direction shall we ride?" asked Felix Bradford of his companion.

"Oh, to the lake, I suppose. That seems to be the only point of interest in the neighborhood."

She gave a little weary sigh as she glanced about her. Only a flat, monotonous landscape met her view, with no beauty except such as could be gleaned from the luxuriant cotton-fields and those in which the yellow stalks of corn were almost hidden by the tall rank grass and the morning-glory vines that enwrapped them. The road was a dreary, sandy waste, the woods skirting it a dense growth of scrubby "black-jacks," and the sky as colorless as the cheeks of a faded beauty. But Christie, who had the eye of an Indian for color, was soon forgetful of these minor drawbacks in her enjoyment of the flaming splendors of the golden-rod mingled with the imperial purple of the aster and poke-berry. In the swags, too, the coreopsis burned like a yellow fire with a dark crim-

son glow at the heart of it. Still she sighed for her native blue hills with their gold and purple cloud-masses piled up behind them, her bright sparkling streams leaping from rock to rock, dancing over their pebbly beds, or gaily circling in some deep, shadow-flecked pool, and, above all, for a draught of her pure, fresh, mountain air. There was intoxication in the very thought of it all, and it was with some disgust that she glanced down at a poor little muddy stream into which their horses' feet were splashing.

"Oh, Mr. Bradford, how can you content yourself in Texas? Don't you get very home-sick at times?"

He smiled as he replied, "I confess I would like a sight of our Berkshires, but, altogether, I like Texas quite as well, and, perhaps, even better than I expected."

"Whatever made you leave such a country as you have described yours to be for this?"

She scarcely knew why she asked the question, for she was perfectly aware of the circumstances under which he had come; but he replied, as if giving her a piece of information with which she was unfamiliar.

"There were several reasons, the principal of which was the state of my health. My lungs were not over-strong, and a residence at the South was advised for me. It was this, you remember, which led to my going to the University of Virginia. Your father proposed to mine the plan that Champney and I should go there together, and thus it came about that he and I met and have perpetuated the friendship of our parents. Then, when your brother discovered that I was in search of some such position as I now have, he recommended me to your uncle at whose solicitation I came."

"And you have never regretted it?"

"Not for a moment. Indeed, I have been very happy here ; such a wide field of usefulness has been opened for me. My only regret is that I have not been able to get at the hearts of the people as I would like. This is absolutely necessary for the success of my plans, for of course my influence with my boys is lessened by their parents' dislike of me. I have much prejudice to overcome on account of my northern birth, I find, and there are many ways in which I ignorantly run counter to their ideas. I owe much to your uncle's wise advice. But for him I suppose I would long ago have been tarred, feathered, and drummed out of the country. The Texans do such things sometimes, you know," he said, with a smile. "General Royston refused to take me into his own family, saying that it would be better for me to board with a man of smaller means and less prominence socially than himself. The first week I was in my new quarters I mortally offended my landlady by purchasing for myself a supply of towels when I found that I was expected to use the family roller."

Christie laughed merrily. "I can readily imagine what a dire insult Mrs. Long conceived that to be. But, Mr. Bradford, there has been another obstacle in your way of which, perhaps, you are unaware. You are sure you won't mind my telling you?"

"Surely not ; I would be an ingrate indeed not to thank you for any help you can give me in this matter."

"Well then, tell me—haven't you regarded yourself rather as a missionary sent to enlighten the heathen in the work you are doing here?"

He flushed a little, hesitated and then replied, "I

believe I have. Some of my pupils are thorough little savages, Miss Royston."

"I don't doubt that in the least, but it won't do for you to let them know you think so,—still less their parents. The Texan has a keen insight into the motives of others, is a great stickler for his own opinions, has an exalted sense of his own dignity, and if the people here thought you felt yourself in the least superior to themselves in any respect their pride would take the alarm at once."

"I am aware of that fact and have tried to guard against it."

"Yes, but you have made enemies nevertheless. I have heard you condemned for this very thing by some of the patrons of your school."

He was silent and thoughtful for a time, and then said musingly, "So those offensive words were really meant for me."

"Of what do you speak?" she asked.

"Only some disagreeable things that were said in my hearing to-day, at Warner's store, of Yankees who came down here thinking they knew more than any one else and who needed to have their pride 'tuk down a peg or two.' Then there was a long tirade about abolition incendiaries sent here to incite the negroes to insurrection and how they'd better look sharp or they'd find themselves swinging from the nearest tree. I scarcely know what was said; I tried not to hear it. I think the men had been drinking, and their conversation was so interlarded with oaths that I came away. I heard them laugh and say that I had shown the 'white feather,' but I gave no heed to it."

"When was this?" asked Christie. Her eyes had

a frightened look and every vestige of color had left her face.

"This afternoon,—about an hour ago; in fact, I went almost immediately from them to you."

"Oh, Mr. Bradford, do be careful. It will be dangerous for you if those people once get it into their heads that you are an emissary of the abolitionists."

"But I am not even an abolitionist,—that is, I think slavery a great evil for the white race as well as the black, but I am not in favor of abolishing it by violent means."

"It would be difficult to convince them of that fact. They have an idea that every Northerner is an Abolitionist, and since the John Brown trouble, are more than ordinarily suspicious. You know, of course, of the rumors that have been recently afloat concerning an intended uprising of the negroes?"

"Yes, but I think there is no foundation for them."

"I don't know," said Christie; and then she told him of what she had seen the night before.

"This begins to look serious," he said. "Hitherto I have given little credence to what I have heard."

They rode on in silence for some time. Then he roused himself by an effort. "I shall be sorry if anything should occur to necessitate my leaving here. I am much interested in my boys, and strongly attached to some of them, especially to Jack. I hope, however, that my efforts will not have been entirely thrown away. I have striven to train them so that they may have the power to acquire knowledge for themselves, impressing upon them the fact that I consider the

school but as the portal to the temple of learning,—that everything will depend upon their own conduct in the future.”

“Don’t you find teaching irksome?”

“Sometimes, I must confess, but I think my present calling one of the noblest on earth, and the thought that I may possibly be the means of developing the brain and hearts of the boys in my charge sustains me. The position involves solemn responsibilities from which I was at first inclined to shrink, feeling as I did, my unfitness for the task. I realize fully how far short of my aims I have fallen here. There are radical differences between my pupils and myself which it seems almost impossible to overcome. My Puritanical education leads me sometimes to clothe the virtues in so stern a garb that they present a repulsive aspect to the young. My very earnestness of purpose has occasionally led me into errors of this sort. I have driven from me those I was most anxious to attract.”

“Jack seems very fond of you.”

“Yes, Jack’s openly-displayed affection has been a source of great comfort to me. He has a heart of gold, Christie,—Miss Royston, I beg your pardon; I was thinking of Jack, and that is what he calls you. The name was spoken unconsciously.”

There was a flush in his dark face as he looked rather shyly into her own. Christie felt a glow upon her cheeks as he did so. “It’s nothing,” she said. “I believe I wouldn’t have observed it if you hadn’t called my attention to it.”

The lake now came into view. It was a very pretty sheet of water, much clearer than the roily streams in its vicinity, and surrounded by cypress trees shrouded in the long gray moss of the South.

"If it were but set in the midst of mountains, how lovely it would be," said Christie.

"Yes, like those in the White Mountains, for instance. I believe you have never seen them."

"No, I have never been north of Mason's and Dixon's line."

"Ah, I shall take great pleasure in showing them to you some day."

The words were quietly spoken, but again they brought the blushes into Christie's cheeks. She glanced furtively at him in the effort to discover whether they held a hidden meaning, but he was looking out over the water in an absent way as quiet and self-contained as usual.

"Do you believe in presentiments?" he asked, suddenly turning toward her.

"No,—yes, I believe I do."

"I do not, but a rather sad one now comes over me,—that I am looking at this familiar scene for, perhaps, the last time. Of course it means nothing," he said as he saw her cheeks paling. "Would you be sorry, Christie?" he asked softly, gazing intently into the brown eyes.

"I—sorry for what, Mr. Bradford?"

"If I should be going away never to return?"

"Of course I would. I shall never forget my friend—who is also my brother's dearest friend," she continued after a moment's pause.

"And I shall never forget my friend's sister. You have made my life here very bright for me, Christie,"—this in the same soft, dreamy tone.

"Is it so?" she said, a happy light coming into her face. "I'm glad to know that."

He opened his lips as if to say something more,

but hesitated and then was silent. When he again spoke it was in his ordinary voice.

"When, do you think, you will return home, Miss Royston?"

"When Papa and Champ come for me, which, I suppose, will be very soon now. I had no idea when I came out last fall that I would be here so long. I had that ugly cough, you know, after an attack of measles, and papa thought a winter in Texas would restore me, so, as he and Champ were going to Mexico to look after those mines, he decided that I should come this far with them. It seems that they will never come back. Champ writes that papa can't tear himself away from his archæological researches, and that's what is now detaining him. He's greatly interested in Mexican antiquities, you remember."

"Are you so anxious to go home?"

"Oh no, I'm very happy here. I'm quite fond of my relatives who are as kind as possible, but I know Grandmamma misses me and I feel that I should be with her."

"What a stately little lady she is! I saw her once while I was at the university."

"Isn't she just the dearest little woman in the world?" she asked, her eyes shining with the tears that would come at thought of the old home and the precious grandmother. "I'm very foolish," she said, as she wiped them away, "but I am more than ordinarily attached to my grandmother. She took charge of Champ and myself when our own mother died. I was but a babe at the time, so she is the only mother I have ever known. But, come, Mr. Bradford, see how long the shadows are. The sun is getting low. It's time for us to return home."

Just before reaching Cairo, the little village near which her uncle lived, they were passed by a body of men, armed to the teeth, and straining their horses to their utmost speed. Presently they met another, and this time Felix Bradford signalled to them to stop, that he might make inquiry as to the cause of the unusual commotion. Only a momentary halt was made, however, one of them hastily saying, "Ride on home es fast es ye kin. The niggers is all a-risin'."

"Don't be alarmed," said Mr. Bradford, as he saw how pale Christie was growing. "I have no doubt the danger is exaggerated. There is small probability that the negroes would attempt any violence in open daylight."

In Cairo they found the utmost excitement prevailing. Parties of armed men were dashing in from all directions having in charge terrified-looking negroes. Others were guarding the prisoners already brought in, being careful to keep them apart that there might be no communication between them. Among these were two white men whom Christie had sometimes seen, and Uncle Hylas, looking very crest-fallen as he glanced down sorrowfully at his manacled hands and feet. Seeing Mr. Linton, a gentleman living in the neighborhood, Felix Bradford questioned him as to the meaning of it all.

"There is now no need for alarm," said he, noting Christie's pale cheeks. "All danger is over since the discovery of the plot. Whatever may have been the intentions of the negroes, they will not dare to carry them into effect."

"Who are those white men?" asked Mr. Bradford.

"You mean Cross and Alden. They came out

here a year ago from some one of the Northern States, and are said to be the instigators of this plot. How much truth there may be in this I don't know, but, innocent or guilty, they are liable to be lynched at any moment."

Christie shuddered. "Surely your people would not be so rash as to do such a thing unless the guilt of these men should be certainly established," exclaimed Felix Bradford.

"Ordinarily, they would not, but there is nothing so cruel or unreasoning as a panic such as has now seized upon them. The thought that the lives and honor of the women of the country are at stake will nerve them to do anything they may deem necessary for their protection. I would advise you to keep very quiet, Bradford. Your Northern birth will render you an object of suspicion, and the veriest trifle may lead to your arrest."

"I think there is no danger."

"Don't trust to the suggestions of your fearless nature. Go home and remain there quietly."

"Mr. Linton is right, Mr. Bradford," said Christie. "Let's go home as quickly as possible. Oh, Mr. Linton, promise me to do all you can to prevent violence."

"You may depend upon me for that, Miss Royston. Your uncle and I have agreed upon a course of action, but we must proceed very warily, or we will lose what little influence we may possess. As you know, we are the largest slave-owners within several miles and might be suspected of interested motives."

"I see; but, come, Mr. Bradford, do let's go home."

"You must not be anxious about me, Miss Roy-

ston," he said, as they rode on. "I feel sure Mr. Linton's fears are groundless. The people here are too brave to suspect an innocent man."

"Except in times like these when they are madened by fear. I do think you are in danger. I wish you would go away while there's yet time."

"I could never do that. I would only be giving them ground for their suspicions."

"True, true," she said sadly, and was silent. "Do be careful," she said, in a tone of earnest entreaty, as he bade her adieu.

"Never fear for me," he answered, warmly pressing the hand that lay in his.

Christie found her aunt and Virginia alone with the servants. Her uncle had been appointed one of the vigilance committee in Cairo, Max had not yet returned home, and Jack, who was of an investigating turn of mind, was out in quest of news.

"Aren't you afraid, Aunt Virginia?" she asked, as she saw Mrs. Royston quietly seated in her room with Ginny on her lap listening to the recital of one of her favorite fairy stories.

"Not in the least now, Christie. I was a little alarmed at first, but as soon as I had time to think the matter over calmly, I felt sure the danger was over with the discovery of the plot. The negroes, poor things, are now most to be pitied. They are stealing about like ghosts, seeming literally dazed with fright."

Christie looked at her aunt in amazement. This delicate little woman, ordinarily so nervously timid, was now as brave as possible in the face of real danger. For very shame she would put aside her own tremors and fear no evil.

"But tell me, Aunt Virginia, how was the plot discovered?"

"It seems that Wiley Smith overheard some negroes discussing it. They said the white men, Cross and Alden, were at the head of it, and implicated a number of subordinate leaders among the negroes, one of them Uncle Hylas. That mummary last night may have had a serious meaning after all, Christie."

She spoke in such a calm, quiet tone that Christie began to feel her fearlessness infectious, so they sat and talked as usual while they waited supper for her uncle and Jack. When they came, the evening meal passed cheerfully, though it may be surmised that there was in each member of the family an underlying sense of anxious insecurity.

"I am going down to the quarters," said General Royston, as he rose from the table.

"Let me go with you, Uncle Lewis," said Christie.

He hesitated. "Why do you wish to go, Christie?"

"I hardly know; it's just a whim I suppose."

"Well, I know no reasonable objection to your doing so."

"I believe I'll go too," said Mrs. Royston.

"Me too," chimed in Ginny.

"An' I won't be lef' behin'," said Jack.

"The negroes will think I brought you all as my body-guard," laughed General Royston when his convey was fairly under weigh. They saw Aunt Dilsie and the other house-servants peeping stealthily at them as they passed the kitchen, but nothing was said by either party.

"Aun' Dilsie's been as mute as a mouse this evenin' fur onct in her life," said Jack. "I b'lieve ef I'd a-

asked her fur her head off her shoulders to-night she'd a-give it to me an' never grum'led about it nuther."

"She does seem badly frightened," said his mother.

"Run on ahead of us, Jack, and tell the negroes to meet me in the square. I have something to say to them," said General Royston.

The summons was so promptly obeyed that when they reached the square they found quite a number already awaiting them. Soon all were assembled. The moon was shining brightly, and the master ran his eye quickly over the crowd to make sure that none of the heads of the families were missing.

"My people," he began,—“you are my people, for the present entrusted to my care, and for whose comfort and well-being I hold myself responsible to God,—I have asked you to meet me here in order that we may have a better understanding with each other. You know, of course, of what you are accused. You know that Hylas has been arrested and loaded with chains as one of the ring-leaders in a plot to murder all the white people and to divide their property among yourselves. I do not ask you if you are guilty. What I want to say to you is that it is utterly impossible for you to carry out such a design—that you will only bring suffering upon yourselves by the rash attempt. If you will be patient, this vexed question of slavery will eventually settle itself, but let me implore you never to venture to take the matter into your own hands if you do not wish to bring total ruin and destruction upon your race. Circumstance has made me your master. I have tried to be a good one,”—Cries of “Yes, marster, dat yer is,” were heard at this juncture—“and, please God, I will do what I consider

to be my duty by you, as long as I hold this relation to you. If you have been guilty in this matter, I freely forgive you, for I know how sweet the thought of freedom must be to you,"—"Yes, bless Gawd!" said old Uncle Billy, the patriarch of the place,—“but you have taken the wrong means to secure it. Some time when you and I are less excited than now we will talk this matter over calmly and see what we can make of it. I have never yet deceived you, have I?” “No, marster, dat you ain’t,” was heard from all sides. “Then I think you will believe what I have said to you to-night. And now I must be away from home all night. Max is gone also, and I can leave no one except Jack to protect my wife, niece, and little girl, but I do not fear for them. I trust you. I know that no harm will come to them if you can help it.” “No, marster, dat der sha’n’t,” was the unanimous reply. “Now go home and remain there quietly. I will do what I can for you in this matter. If Hylas is as guilty as he is said to be, I cannot shield him from punishment. As for the rest of you, I believe you to have been led astray by him.”

They quietly dispersed to their homes, and the family returned to the house. “You and Christie will not be afraid?” asked General Royston of his wife, as he prepared to leave them for the night.

“Not at all. Don’t let a thought of us worry you.”

When he was gone, Christie became restless. Her aunt, feeling fatigued, lay down beside Ginny, and soon both were asleep. Christie sat for some time on the veranda or “gallery” as it is called in this, and, indeed, many portions of the south, listening to Jack’s account of what he had seen down in the village.

They could hear the clatter of horses' hoofs in every direction, the cries of the men to each other, and, saddest of all, the blows bestowed upon the shrieking negroes as they were examined under the torture of the lash.

Cruel? So it was, and so all who were engaged in the miserable affair afterwards felt it to be, but in times like these, the instinct of self-preservation becomes stronger than any other, transforming men into brute beasts as wild and fierce as any that ever roamed the woods. It was a crisis like this that will send the hitherto unstained name of Governor Eyre of Jamaica down to future generations as that of a monster of cruelty. Let us not judge them too hardly. None of us know of what enormities we are capable until the opportunity is given for the exercise of those brutish instincts, of whose very existence we may, until that moment, have been ignorant. Ages of civilization and Christian enlightenment have failed to divorce the animal from the spiritual nature of man. However god-like he may become, his feet are yet but of clay.

"Let's go down to the gate, Jack," said Christie, after a time. They went out into the moonlight and stood in silence, Christie leaning on the gate-post and looking up to the starry dome which to-night, seemed so near that she had but to spring into the air to reach it. The moon was laughing down upon her, its great, round face looking into her own with such a smirk as was, under the circumstances, an offense scarcely to be forgiven, and the stars, true courtiers that they were, were twinkling and smiling in sympathy with their queen.

It was as if they said, "Oh, you puny earth-pigmies! ever aspiring to reach the heavens, deeming no

labor too great to effect your purpose,—like the giants of old piling Ossa upon Olympus and Pelion upon Ossa in the effort, yet are cast back, bound down as with bands of iron, by a mightier than the mighty Hercules,—your own volcanic passions. Under the flaming fires of an *Ætna* you lie, groaning, struggling to regain the light, often in your awful throes convulsing the world, and reddening its soil with human gore, yet there you have lain for ages past, and will remain for ages to come. Ha, ha ! it makes us laugh to see that it is so ! that no lesson of wisdom or repentance has been learned from the needless tortures you have borne. Lo, there ! Justice sits blinded by your own act, helpless to guide you, and Mercy, weeping and hiding her face with her white wings, has been driven from her throne. Since the world was created, might has made right,—the strong have oppressed the weak. As it has been, so it shall be to the end of time. Ha, ha ! ‘What fools these mortals be !’ ”

Christie fell into an absorbing reverie as she stood there with the mocking voices all about her, and Jack, perceiving her mood, remained silent. There came the sound of horses’ feet dashing up the road. “I wonder who they’ve got now ?” said he, with all a boy’s eager curiosity. The events of the afternoon had given rather a pleasing variety to the monotony of his life. It was not to be expected that he could fully realize the gravity of the situation. The horsemen now rushed into view. Mounted on the same animal with one of his guards, was a white man with his hands fast bound behind his back. His pale face was lighted up by large dark eyes, in which glowed a fire of such passionate scorn as Christie had never seen. No sooner had they fallen upon her, however,

than they melted into liquid softness, and a sad, tender smile played about his mouth.

"Oh, Christie, it's Mr. Bradford!" wailed Jack.

Christie made no reply. She felt as though she were turning to stone.

"Never mind, Jack, my boy; I'm all right," called out the prisoner, as they rode rapidly past.

"Be quiet, will you!" commanded his captor.

Christie sank to the ground as the cavalcade disappeared, and buried her face in her hands. She did not scream nor faint; she was thinking as she had never done before. She knew now beyond a doubt that she loved Felix Bradford. She must save him, but how? Presently she raised her head. "Run, Jack," she said, almost breathlessly. "Follow them and see where and how he is confined. Find out everything about him you can, and come back to tell me. We must save him."

Jack was off like a shot. Christie rose, and though her limbs seemed made of ice, walked steadily and quickly into the house. Up-stairs she went, straight to Max's room. Procuring a full suit of his clothes, and snatching up a hat she saw hanging on the wall, she carried them to her own apartment. Only a few moments were required for the exchange of her own garments for his, and then she stole out to the stable and put her uncle's saddle on Fire-fly, meantime giving the horse an extra allowance of oats. Then she went out to the front gate to watch for Jack. Soon he came, panting for breath, but running with the speed of a deer-hound.

"Why, Max, you got back?" he cried, on seeing her. "Oh, Max, sech awful doin's as they're a-havin' here. An' now they've got poor Mr. Bradford," and

the warm-hearted boy broke down and blubbered outright.

"Where is he?"

As well as he could for the sobs that he could not repress, he gave a full account of the situation.

"Jack!" said Christie, in her own voice, at the same time raising her hat from her head.

Jack started back in amazement. "Max! Christie! which is it?"

"Do I look very much like Max, Jack?" she asked, eagerly.

"I never would a-knowed you in the worl', Chris! I'd a-swore you was Max!"

"That makes me more hopeful. Listen, Jack. I am going to save Mr. Bradford, and you must help me to do it."

"I'll do all I can, Christie. I'd be willin' to die to git him out o' this fix."

"I hope we can accomplish it without resorting to such extreme measures. Come, I have bridled and saddled Fire-fly. You go get him from the stable and lead him as quietly as you can to that clump of woods just back of Mr. Brotherson's house. You say Mr. Bradford is chained to a tree near it?"

"Yes."

"Very well, I'll go down and manage by some means to be placed on guard over him. As soon as you have hitched Fire-fly, come to me, and it will go hard with us if we don't find some means to set our friend free."

"Oh, Christie, I hope we will. Do you reckon they'll hang him ef we don't?"

She shuddered. "There's no telling what they may do, Jack."

When Jack made his way to the tree to which Mr. Bradford was secured, he saw Christie on guard with a gun on her shoulder. He wondered how she had managed it so quickly, but he had great faith in her ability to do what she liked, and felt that, after all, it was only natural that she should be there.

"Jack," she said in a low tone, when she saw that she could speak to him unperceived, "you see there is no one near us except Jim Kirby, guarding that negro over there. Go to him presently with a summons from some one at the academy. And, Jack, mind, not a word or hint to let Mr. Bradford know who I am."

Jack disappeared, and soon after came running toward them. "Jim, Jim!" he called, "you are wanted down at the 'cademy. They say I mus' take your place fur a little while. Here! give me your gun."

Jim, a stupid, good-natured fellow, did as he was told, nothing doubting Jack's assertion. No sooner had he turned the fence-corner near them, than Christie had cut the ropes that bound Mr. Bradford's hands. "Quick, quick," she whispered. "Ask no questions and follow me." They stole along under the shadows of the trees, and made their way undiscovered to the clump of woods where Fire-fly was concealed. Jack was already there, holding the spirited horse by the bridle.

"Mount him at once and fly for your life," said Christie, in the same suppressed tone. "And here, take this," handing him a purse filled with gold. "Don't refuse it," she said, imploringly, as she saw him hesitate. "Without it, you cannot effect your escape."

He took it from her and put it into his pocket

without a word. Then, turning impulsively toward her, he caught up her hands and kissed them, one after the other, tenderly, reverently. "It is very sweet to owe my life to you in this way, Christie. God helping me, I will make it worthy of you. I will never forget what you have done for me this night, my friend. Good-by. May holy angels guard you."

Again he passionately kissed her hands, and then, with a lingering pressure, let them go. Christie turned away, her face dyed with blushes. It had been no part of her programme to allow him to penetrate her disguise, but he had known her from the first. He now turned to Jack and threw an arm about his neck. "Jack, I may never see you again. Be a man—a manly man, my boy, and,—take good care of Christie."

"I will, I will," answered the boy, choking back the sobs that rose into his throat.

Mr. Bradford then mounted the horse, and, with a gesture of farewell, rode away into the world of shadows that lay beyond them.

"Oh, Jack, Jack!" cried Christie. She threw her arms around him, leaned her head on his shoulder and wept as if her heart would break. Her whole frame shook with the sobs that convulsed her.

"Come, come, Christie, this won't never do," he said, in a voice from which he could not banish a tremor. "We mus' be a-goin'. Jim Kirby'll be a-comin' back direc'ly, an' then they'll ketch us out here an' fin' out which-a-way Mr. Bradford went. Come, he tol' me to take keer o' you, you know."

"Yes, yes, I'm coming." She followed him meekly, and gradually grew calmer. "Remember, Jack," she said, as they were approaching the house,

"you are never to tell of this masquerade of mine, unless it becomes absolutely necessary. I have always regarded this wearing of men's clothes as unmaidenly in the highest degree, and nothing but the dire necessity of the case would have induced me to do it."

"King George an' all his hosses couldn' drag it out o' me ef you didn' want me to tell, Christie."

"And now, good-night, my dear boy. I will always love and bless you for what you have done for me to-day."

"Oh, that wa'n't nothin'," he replied, hastily turning away to conceal his emotion.

Christie stole up-stairs, returned Max's clothes to his room, and after kneeling and commending Felix Bradford to the care of Him who is ever ready to befriend the friendless, lay down, and, in spite of all her troubles, was soon asleep. Her vigil of the preceding night, and the excitements of the day had exhausted her strength in no small degree.

CHAPTER IV.

WHAT THE MOON SAW.

“CHRISTIE! Christie!” called Jack, just after the dawn of day, “are you asleep? Oh, Christie, they’ve got po’ Max now! They say he let Mr. Bradford a-loose, an’ ’at he’s been a-aidin’ an’ abettin’ of the enemy, an’ I seen him jest now a-goin’ inter the ’cademy with his hands tied behin’ him.” He stopped to gulp down the sobs he felt it would be a disgrace to utter. “Po’ feller,” he went on, a moment afterwards, “all the starch is took out of him fur onct in his life, shore. He looked like he’d been drawed th’ough a auger-hole.”

Christie understood this forced attempt at humor. She knew that Jack’s heart was almost bursting with love and grief and fear for Max.

“Is it so, Jack?” said she, starting up at once, and beginning hastily to dress herself. “That will never do. Never mind! we’ll soon put a stop to it all. Just wait until I can arrange my dress and I’ll go with you to the academy.”

Jack was calmed at once. He felt that Christie would know just what to do and that it would be sure to be the right thing. In a few minutes they were hurrying down the road to the village.

“To think,” said Jack, indignantly, “’at these people ’at I’ve always thought so much of should go an’ treat Mr. Bradford, an’ then my own dear brother

so dog-mean ! I wouldn' a-b'lieved it of 'em, would you ?"

"They are not doing this thing of themselves, Jack. They're only driven by the evil passions that have taken possession of them. They'll be sorry enough for it all when the excitement is over."

"Do you s'pose they'll hang me an' you ef they fin' out we let Mr. Bradford a-loose, Christie ?"

"They can do nothing to you, Jack. You but acted under my orders. No, they will not harm you."

"You may look at it that-a-way, Chris, but I don't. No, sicee ! ef you swing, I'll swing too, fur I done jest as much as you did." He put his hands about his throat as if to measure it. "One thing certain," he said, chuckling with satisfaction, "it'll take a purty strong rope to break this neck o'mine, an' I can kick like all forty, too."

"You needn't fear, Jack. I think—I am sure no harm will come to either of us. Your people are too brave to make war upon women and children."

Jack's countenance fell. His aspirations for the glories of martyrdom were not likely to be realized, after all ; and, moreover, he considered himself to be beyond the age at which he should be classed with "children." There was not time to argue the matter, however, for they had now arrived at the academy. They found the doors closed, but, owing to the warmth of the weather, the windows were thrown open, and near one of these Christie saw the familiar face of Eb. Banks. Approaching him she asked, "Mr. Banks, is Max still there ?"

"Yes," he whispered, "they're a-tryin' ov him now."

"Can you let me in ? I can prove his innocence."

"I'll see."

He disappeared, but in a few minutes opened one of the doors and beckoned her and Jack to come in. She felt no fear for herself; her whole soul was bent on saving Max. The room was filled with men, rough-looking for the most part, and she felt that every eye was fixed upon her as she entered it, but she did not flinch from their gaze. She saw her uncle, pale, but calm and dignified as usual, sitting before a desk, evidently the presiding officer of the occasion. Like another Brutus, he was called upon to sit in judgment on his own son. Before him stood Max, his face colorless, and dark circles under his eyes, but holding himself firmly erect, with the courage of conscious innocence.

Christie made her way hastily toward him, and stood by his side. Jack, following her closely, took up his station beside her. In his rugged face shone the determination to "do or die" in her defense. There was a moment's silence after her entrance. She took advantage of it to speak at once.

"Uncle, I have come to tell you and our friends here that Max is innocent of what he has been accused. I am the guilty one. I released Mr. Bradford, and am ready to take whatever punishment may have been assigned to him."

"I helped you, Christie," cried Jack, indignantly. "You never could a got him off ef it hadn' a-been fur me, an' you know it!"

"That's true," she said, smiling down fondly upon him, "but Jack was not in the least to blame. He merely obeyed my instructions."

"Why did you do it, Miss Royston?" she was asked. "Didn't you know that he had been arrested

as an enemy to the community?—that he was accused of having tampered with the fidelity of our negroes?"

"Yes, didn' you know he wur a emersary ov them darned aberlishunists sent down here ter persuade the niggers ter rise an' kill all the white folks?" called another voice.

"I knew of what he had been accused, but I also knew him to be innocent of the charge brought against him. He is my brother's dearest friend—the son of one who was as a brother to my father. In the days long past, my father owed his life to the father of Felix Bradford. I knew there was no accounting for what an excited mob might do. Was I to stand quietly by and see my friend die a dog's death without an effort to save him?"

"No, by thunder!" roared Eb. Banks, springing upon a seat and flourishing a pistol in a way that gave an added fierceness to his already savage appearance, clothed as he was from head to foot in buckskin garments, with his long black elf-locks escaping from beneath his 'coon-skin cap, and falling about his swarthy, Indian-like face in wild confusion. "I says no, ye wur not ter blame, an' I'll put a bullit-hole tho' ary man 'at lows ye done wrong, Chris! Thes let him rise up an' say so now, ur furever atter hol' his peace. I've got my navy-six ready fur him."

A crowd like this is easily moved from one extreme to another. Courage, or in his own parlance, "spunk," is what the Texan admires beyond all things else. The sight of this beautiful girl standing there so fearless in her defense of her friend, and the thought of the brave deed itself, roused their admiration to such a pitch that only a spark was needed to kindle it into enthusiasm.

"Hooray!" called first one and then another, until it deepened into so deafening a shout that even the prisoners outside lifted their wan faces in curiosity to know the cause.

"May my cousin go free?" asked Christie, when the noise had somewhat subsided.

"Yes, an' you too! An' Jack too!" resounded on all sides.

"Hold!" thundered a voice so commanding in its tones that all looked toward the speaker, Christie with the rest. Her face paled as she met the gleam of venomous hatred in the snaky eyes that looked into her own with a basilisk gaze. "Fools that you are,—forgive me, my friends, if I use rather strong language, for only such seems suited to the occasion,—you are about to release the prisoner upon a momentary impulse, without examining into the affair. How could the girl liberate the Yankee teacher without the connivance of her cousin? His own father admits that he was placed on guard over the prisoner, Bradford. Is not this so?" he asked of Gen. Royston.

"Yes," assented that gentleman slowly and sadly. "I, myself, gave the order that he should relieve the former guard."

"How do you account for this?" asked Julian Lambert, the former speaker, turning to Christie. "How could you cut the cords that bound the prisoner without the knowledge of his guard, who was only a few feet away?"

"I understand your motive for this, sir!" She spoke haughtily, and her eyes flashed with indignation. "You wish to force me to what you know will be a humiliating confession. The thought was sug-

gested to you by seeing the striking resemblance between my cousin and myself as we stand here together. My friends," she continued, turning to the mass of her audience, "I will tell you, since I must, what I would have preferred to remain a secret between Jack and myself. I am not ashamed nor sorry for what I did, but I was betrayed by my extreme anxiety for my friend, into what may be considered by many of you, an unmaidenly act. I disguised myself in a suit of my cousin's clothes, and this so effectually that not even my uncle discovered the deceit. There! I have told you everything now." Her face was crimson with blushes, her eyes had filled with tears of mortification, but her voice remained firm.

"Bully for ye, Chris!" shouted Eb. Banks. "Hooray fur Miss Christybel Royston!"

Again the cry was taken up and passed from lip to lip. Jack caught the infection, threw up his old straw hat, spun round on one foot like a top and screamed until he was hoarse.

"Christie, my brave girl," whispered her uncle, catching up her hands in his, "give your old uncle a kiss, will you?"

She looked up into his face very wistfully. "Oh, uncle Lewis, hav'n't I disgraced the Royston name forever?"

"I think not—I hope not," he said, smiling fondly into the upturned face so full of beseeching entreaty for forgiveness.

"What will Grandmamma say?" she asked, almost breathlessly. "She'll be horrified to the last degree."

"Never mind! we'll make it all right with her. Cheer up, little one! You have not committed the unpardonable sin."

She called to Jack and slipped out of the house as quietly as possible. They were soon joined, however, by her uncle and Max, the meeting having been adjourned for breakfast. The latter began a profusion of thanks to his cousin for her services in his behalf.

"Spare yourself further heroics, Max," said his father quietly. "No harm would have come to you, I am sure. They would never have dared to injure you, even had you been guilty of what they accused you. Bradford himself was arrested only on suspicion. I doubt if they could have made out a case against him, though, in their present temper, his life was not safe and I was glad to hear that he had escaped. Do you know, Christie, that Julian Lambert was the instigator of his arrest? It was a dastardly act. Had he any special enmity against him, think you?"

Christie's face flushed. She did know but did not choose to tell her uncle just then that, a short time before, Lambert had presumed to make an offer of marriage to herself which she had scornfully rejected. He had at that time accused her of preferring Felix Bradford to himself, and had vowed vengeance upon them both. The thought flashed into her mind that he might have brought about this dreadful state of affairs in order to gratify his thirst for revenge, but it was too horrible to be entertained for a moment. She merely replied, "Mr. Lambert is a bad, bad man, Uncle Lewis! He is capable of doing anything that is vindictive and cruel. He hated Mr. Bradford as the bad always hate the good."

"He is a bad man," said General Royston. Max and Jack had walked on ahead of them and he could speak more freely than he would have done in their

presence. "I wish our neighborhood was well rid of him, but I see no chance for that. He is at the bottom of all the mischief among us. I strongly suspect him to have more to do with this affair than appears upon the surface. Both Linton and I have detected glances of intelligence between him and the prisoners, Cross and Alden. It is our opinion that they are but tools in his hands. You know what a mysterious character he is, Christie. He came from, nobody knows where, and he often goes away on long journeys of which he never speaks to any one. He is the owner of a large plantation and a number of slaves—always has plenty of money, too, but every one distrusts him. His negroes stand in such awe of him that they would never dare to reveal his secrets, and such a man as he is—for he has much natural ability—can wield a powerfully-evil influence in a community where there are sure to be some lawless characters, especially in a new country like this."

"He is the worst man I ever knew, Uncle Lewis. I can never breathe freely in his presence. I shouldn't wonder if you and Mr. Linton are right in your suspicions."

At breakfast Max gave them an account of his capture—of how he was riding homeward, half asleep, when he was suddenly seized by a body of armed men who would not at first tell him of what crime he was accused. Utterly ignorant of what had transpired at Cairo, his amazement can better be imagined than described.

Some hours later Jack came to Christie with a crumpled note in his hand. "Fire-fly's got home, Christie, an' none the worse fur his trip. Here's a note I found hid under the saddle." It contained

only a few lines, was addressed to no one, and was without signature. "Thus far I am safe," it ran. "I return Fire-fly with thanks. He has been a trusty friend. Do not fear for me. There is no further danger." It was hastily scrawled with a pencil in irregular lines as if by an uncertain light.

Christie's heart was thus relieved of a great burden. Burying her face in her hands, she returned thanks to God for the safety of him who had not been absent from her waking thoughts since last she had looked into his eyes,—those eyes which, in that supreme agony of parting had told her what his lips had never yet revealed. Why he had persisted in maintaining silence she did not know, but she felt it was for some good reason. This was why she gloried in her love—that she could implicitly trust its object.

The hours of that long, hot day passed wearily and painfully to all concerned. The excitement and sleeplessness of the preceding night had been followed by its natural sequence—a depression of spirits due quite as much to physical as mental causes. And still the question whether the leaders of the intended insurrection should be granted the boon of life was no nearer a solution than at first.

General Royston, Mr. Linton, Eb. Banks and some others fought bravely against the exercise of mob-law. True, the negro prisoners, examined separately, and having held no communication with any one since their arrest, had implicated the two men, Cross and Alden, but they were catechised under the lash, and the same leading questions addressed to each. It was easy to see how they might have been led to do this, and yet the accused have been innocent. These few law-abiding citizens would have been willing to give them the

benefit of the doubt, but they found themselves powerless against the rushing tide of public opinion. Still they fought on, hoping against hope, yet feeling that each hour was so much gained. Not only were the lives of the unfortunate prisoners involved, but they felt the danger of establishing such a precedent in a community like their own, made up as it was of such motley elements,—as must be the case in all newly-settled countries. The spirit of adventure that leads many to them, also betrays its possessors into unlawful means of gratifying it.

The people living in and around Cairo were, as a rule, hospitable, kind and sympathetic in illness or misfortune, industrious and energetic to a certain degree, and the majority, however rude or uncultivated, possessed of a sterling good sense, which stood them in good stead of the education and culture they lacked. Still there were some, especially among the wilder and more youthful spirits, for whom the very fact that an act was illegal, would invest it with an irresistible fascination. Once let public opinion be in favor of giving to these the right to punish misdeeds with death—without recourse to the law, and no man's life would be secure. Besides, there had long been whispered rumors that Julian Lambert was at the head of a secret organization, of which he had unlimited control, and this fact rendered circumspection especially necessary in the present case. So, in spite of fatigue, these brave men fought on, feeling that the question involved interests of momentous import in the future.

Jack had hovered about all day, industriously gleaning news, and coming home occasionally to report progress to his mother and cousin. Hitherto,

his life had known few excitements. He had been thrilled with a delightful sense of horror, when, in company with Max and a party of negroes, he had gone at midnight into the dark swamps in quest of the 'possum and 'coon, and had roused from their lair larger and fiercer game. He had heard the snapping and snarling of wolves in close proximity to his own body, the scream of the panther, and the ominous growl of the bear. He had passed through the tremors of the "buck ague" on killing his first deer, and his heart had palpitated with joy when shooting a wild turkey on the wing. But all this paled into nothingness beside the interest excited within his youthful breast by the man-hunt in which his elders were now engaged. He was being initiated into the mysteries of human action,—into the arcana of the human heart—and the boy pondered what he had seen and wondered. Happy he and his young companions if, when it is passed, some tithe of their loving trust in their kind has not taken to itself wings and fled, nevermore to return.

In the afternoon, Mrs. Royston and Christie walked down to the village. They found it filled with women and children, some attracted by a morbid desire to see and hear what was going on, but many actuated by a genuine fear that their lives were not safe at home with no male protector.

They joined a party seated on the porch of the house nearest to the academy. It was so near, indeed, that they could hear the hum of voices within, and occasionally catch a few words, as the speakers grew more excited with the debate. The women talked together low and solemnly.

"My dream's out," said one, as she flicked away

the flies from the face of a sleeping child in her lap. "I dremp three nights a-han' runnin' 'at I wur neck-deep in muddy water. I fit an' I scuffled, but 'twa'n't no manner o' use. Ther wa'n't no gittin' out o' thar no more'n ef hit'd a-been ser much tair. An' when I woke up, I wur that wet with presperashun 'at I moughter been in the water fur shore ernough. I telled Brown then 'at I knowed hit meant somethin' out o' the common run o' things. I'm forty-fower year ole, an' a-goin' on ter my forty-five, an' I hain't never knowed nobody ter dream o' bein' in muddy water yit 'uthout trouble a-comin' ter 'em atter'ards. But ye all knows how men-folks is. Brown, he jest wouldn' pay no 'tenshun ter me. Ter tell ye the truth, he didn' make no bones o' laughin' at me right ter my face, an' he 'lowed 'at wimmin wus sech fools hit wur a wonder 'at the Lord let 'em live. I lay 'at he ain't a-laughin' now."

"An' I've been a-goin' ter weddin's every night fur I dunno how long," chimed in another. "Ye knows ther hain't no better sign 'at ye're a-goin' ter a funer'I'n that."

"Well, I kin beat ye all a-dreamin'," said good old Aunt Polly Robinson. "I dremp 'at the niggers'd acshully done ris an' wus a-killin' ov all o' the white folks. I ain't a-tellin' ov ye no lie. I seed 'em jest es plain es I'm-a-seein' o' you'uns right now. But Betsey Ann, she 'lowed 'at hit wan't no wonder 'at I dremp hit, fur I didn' think nur talk o' nothin' else but the niggers a-risin' fum mornin' plum tel night. An' she put me in min' o' how much bakin an' fried cabbige I'd eat fur my supper that night, an' I let her talk me inter her way o' thinkin' about hit. But now I knows

hit wur the Lord's doin'. He sent me that dream fur a warnin'."

"Well, I hain't no Joseph fur a-dreamin' o' dreams," said Mrs. White, who sat listening intently to the talk of the others while she rubbed snuff on her teeth from a great brown bottle she held in her hand. She paused to expectorate into a "chink" of the floor before she said more. She spoke with an air of profound wisdom, and looked as though she knew a deal more than she chose to tell. "I hain't none o' yer dreamers, myself. I works hard an' airns my vittuls, an' I goes ter sleep an' don' know nothin' more tel nex' mornin'. But I reckon I kin see es much whenst I'm awake es ennybody, an' I've been a-scein' a plenty here lately. Ye all knows Mimy,—that owdashus nigger wench o' ourn?"

Yes, they all knew her. How could it be otherwise? Mimy was the only slave owned by the Whites, and her shortcomings were usually the theme of her mistress' discourse when gossiping with her neighbors. There were those among them who did not wonder at Mimy's occasional rebellion against that mistress' authority. Mrs. White was known in the neighborhood as a "rusher," and some did not scruple to express the opinion that the poor negro was "that drove 'at she didn' have no sense lef'."

"Well," continued Mrs. White, mopping her brush into her bottle, "ye all knows how that thar nigger's jest been the torment o' my life. An' me es good ter her es ef I'd a-been her own born sister. I wonder sometimes 'at I'm ennythin' in the worl' but skin an' bone. I can't sen' that creetur ter do a blessed thing but whut I mus' go a-traipsin' airtter her ter see ef she do hit right. I tells White a heaps o' times

'at I'd mos' ruther do hit all myself at fust. Well, t'other day, I'd been a-scol'in' ov her fur somethin',— I disremember adzackly jest whut hit wur, but she's al'ys a-doin' somethin'; well, sir, she turns right roun' on me, she doos, an' she look at me like es ef s'he'd jest a-liketer a-stobbed me thoo the heart. An' toreckly sh'she, 'Yer's al'ays been a-havin' o' yer good time, Miss Jerushy,' sh'she, 'but I hopes an' prays de good Lawd 'at mine'll be a-comin' afo' long,' sh'she. Now yer tell me 'at that thar nigger didn' know whut wur a-goin' on amongs' them dev'lish black 'uns 'at's been a-plottin' ter kill us all? By good rights she'd oughter swing fur hit, too, but I'll make hit hot ernough fur her. She'll wush a many a time 'at she had a-swinged afore I gits thoo with her," and the mop was complacently returned to the capacious mouth well laden with snuff.

"Lor, mammy," said a little girl who was sitting near her, "Aun' Mimy didn' mean no harm by a-sayin' that. She's been a talkin' that-a-way ever since I kin ricollect. She's al'ays a-tellin' me o' the good times she's agoin' ter have whenst she gits ter the New Jer-ooslum. That's whut she meant whenst she said that ter you. An' she say 'at ther won' be nobody thar ter tarrerfy the life out'n her."

Mrs. White leaned forward and gave her loquacious daughter a sounding thwack on one of her cheeks. "Thar, now, smarty, take that fur yer imperdunce. Ye're jest es bad es ole Mimy enny day. None o' yer whimperin' now. I jest won't have hit. Ef you don't like whut I done ter ye, ye'll jest ha' ter lump hit, that's all. Nobody never axed ye ter put in yer jaw nohow. Nex' time I reckon ye'll ricollect 'at childern was made to be seed an' not heerd."

At this juncture Christie made a digression in favor of the little culprit, and soon a brisk conversation was being carried on under cover of which the child stole away to have a quiet cry for being, as she felt, disgraced before so many people. "I wouldn't a-minded hit," sobbed she, "ef Miss Christie hadn' a-been thar. She's my Sunday-school teacher, an' she'll think I'm sech a bad girl." Suddenly she felt an arm about her neck. Looking up, she saw the sweet face of her teacher smiling upon her.

"There, there, don't cry," said Christie. "Your mother didn't mean to make you so unhappy. She has forgotten all about it now. Suppose you go back with me. No one thinks less of you for your punishment."

The child quietly did as she was bidden. It was not the first time that she had been thus shielded from the consequences of her mother's fits of anger. She sat down on the floor by Christie's chair, partially screened from sight, and soon was smiling at the quaint remarks of those about her.

Christie found that the females were almost unanimously in favor of hanging the prisoners. An excited group hung continuously about the closed doors of the academy, eagerly awaiting the decision that should be made. Some were even clamorous for admittance and the right to vote upon a subject in which their own interests were so deeply involved, but this was politely yet firmly denied them. Never before had Christie realized how the cowardly passion of fear can render the human heart wholly impervious to the suggestions of sympathy or compassion. Now and then a haggard, weary looking man would come out of the academy for a breath of fresh air, to be instantly

pounced upon by these women and so beset with questions and entreaties that he would be glad again to escape into the retreat from which they were excluded.

"Will they hang 'em?" was the inquiry shot as from a catapult by a tall, thin woman, with a sharp nose and hatchet face, at one of the luckless individuals above mentioned, just as his round good-natured face and rotund figure appeared outside the door.

"Don't ax ole man Potter," said a companion. "In co'se he ain't a-goin' ter hang nobody."

"I say, will they hang 'em?" repeated his questioner, disdainfully ignoring the friendly advice.

The gentleman addressed wiped his face with his red handkerchief, loudly blew his nose, made a faint but ineffectual attempt to force his way through the crowd, and then, meekly resigning himself to his fate, beamed mildly upon his wiry antagonist over his horn spectacles. "Can't tell, can't tell, sister Smith, but I sca'cely think they will—I sca'cely think they will. I hope they won't, anyhow."

"Whut?" screamed the termagant. "Whut did ye say, brother Potter? Not hang 'em? I tell ye," and she shook her clenched fists in his face, "ef the men don't hang 'em, the women will! Jest lemme git a fa'r chance at 'em, an' I'll show ye, ye everlastin' cowards, whut ter do!" and she clawed the air with her harpy-like fingers in the impotence of her wrath. And yet this woman was noted for her piety—was the most famous "shouter" in all that region. Not a protracted "meetin'" within a radius of ten miles but sister Smith was there, loudly praising God, exhorting the weeping penitents, singing, praying,—in short, it was considered that a "revival" could scarcely be carried on without her assistance. Another sad proof

of the danger of habitually giving way to emotion, even though it assume the form of religious ecstasy, so easily does one enthusiasm glide into another lower and baser in degree. Christie turned away sick and sad at heart. "Oh, Aunt Virginia, let's go home. It's all too horrible." But she was not to escape so easily. Mrs. Smith had caught sight of her. Here was an object upon which to expend her pent-up fury.

"Lemme git to her," she cried. "Lemme tell her whut I think ov her, right to her face,—that face 'at she think ser mighty much ov! I'd like ter spile her beauty fur her! How dar' she—the Yankee teacher's sweetheart—the nigger-worshiper, show herself ermongst decint white folks? I"—but before she could utter another word, a strong arm was thrown around her, a hand was held tightly over her lips, and she found herself being marched, *nolens volens*, to a house near at hand.

"Run along home, Chris, an' don't berlitttle yerself by comin' ermongst no sech a set ag'in," said Eb. Banks as he passed, still affectionately embracing the irate "sister Smith." "Yes, I know, I knows ye think ye're right, Mis' Smith," she heard him say to his prisoner, "but I'd thank anybody ter stop me when my tongue wur a-runnin' away weth me like yourn wur a-doin' ov thes now, an' I knows in reas'n 'at ye'll thank me fur a-doin' ov hit when ye comes ter yer senses ag'in. That pore leetle gal yander didn' mean no harm by turnin' the Yankee a-loose, an' some o' these days ye'll feel es sorry fur her es I does right now."

He spoke as soothingly as he would have done to a fretful child. The scene was pathetic yet ludicrous in

the extreme. Christie scarcely knew whether to laugh or to cry, but she was not slow to obey Mr. Banks' injunction to go home.

"I can't make out your Texans," she said to her aunt on their way. "They puzzle me more and more."

"It's not that they are so different from the people you have known, Christie; it's only that from the circumstances of their lives they have exhibited to you phases of character hitherto unobserved by you. Human nature is very much the same everywhere, though human lives are always more or less moulded by their surroundings."

When her uncle came home to supper, Christie, noting how pale and weary he looked, begged him to remain at home that night and rest.

"I cannot, Christie; I must go back. We conservatives are in such a minority that the case is almost hopeless at best. I must not lessen our numbers."

"Still no nearer a final decision?"

"No, but if before to-morrow morning we can have Cross and Alden safely lodged in the jail at Santa Rita, the worst will be over. Men's passions will have time to cool, and we will be spared the shame and disgrace of a lynching in our neighborhood. And yet, if lynching ever was justifiable, it would surely be so in a case like this. You know, my dear, that negro evidence is not received in our courts, and we have none other to bring against these prisoners. If they are guilty of the terrible crime of which they are accused, they should not go unpunished. Herein lies our greatest danger, Christie. Men can tamper with the fidelity of our slaves, knowing that they are safe from the law so long as only the slave's evidence

is against them. When you consider this fact, and also the awful consequences of the success of such a plot as has just been discovered, you cannot wonder that our people are eager to take upon themselves the punishment of these men."

"No," she said, shuddering, "I don't wonder at it, nor at any of the fierce passions that have been aroused—not even Mrs. Smith's ecstasies."

"I am more than ever convinced that Julian Lambert is in some way connected with this affair, Christie," he said to her, as they two were afterwards sitting for a few moments on the veranda, enjoying the cool evening air.

"Are there any new developments?"

"Only that when Alden, the younger of the accused men, was exhorted to make confession of his crime in the hope of a pardon, he was, to all appearances, about to do so when a glance from Lambert checked him. This was observed by Linton as well as myself. I fear the men are guilty, but in my opinion, Lambert is by far the guiltiest of the three." He rose wearily. "I wish the sad business was over. It is terrible to have the responsibility of human life in this way."

Christie sat for some time where he had left her, trying to think calmly over the events of the past few days. She could hear her aunt repeating story after story to Ginny, and, by-and-by, the latter lisping her evening prayer, in which she asked God to take care of the poor chained men she had seen down in the village. This was a voluntary addition to her list of those for whom she usually prayed. The tears rose into Christie's eyes as she listened to the words of the pure-hearted child, and she bowed her own head in

silent prayer. After a time Jack came, reporting the same state of affairs as heretofore. An hour had passed almost in silence, when they heard an unusual commotion in the village. The moon had now risen, and all objects around them were clearly visible.

"Let's go down to the clump of woods out there, Jack," said Christie. "Perhaps we can see something of what is going on."

Soon they were in the woods and from some instinct, they scarcely knew what, concealed themselves in the thick undergrowth. Something warned Christie that the crisis had come and she could count the heart-throbs as she silently strained her ears to listen. Presently they heard the measured tramp of horses' feet. They came slowly, the soft, yielding sand muffling the regular hoof-strokes until there was something funereal in the sound. Then through the shadowy moonlight came a host of black-robed figures with ghastly white masks on their faces. In their midst were the prisoners, Cross and Alden, with strong ropes about their necks. Christie never forgot the look of wild-eyed horror on the face of the younger of the two men. That of his companion was as if it wore a leaden mask. As they passed, the guard kept repeating, in a sort of low, monotonous chant, words whose meaning she could not comprehend. Shudderingly she watched them until they had disappeared from view, and then, falling upon her knees and burying her face in her hands, she tried to pray. But her thoughts were one wild whirl of confusion.

"Look, Christie!" said Jack in an awed whisper. "There they are, jest in the holler berlow us, an' now they're a-circlin' roun' that ole black-jack tree—the one 'at's bent over like a bow, you know."

She gave one glance into the hollow depression below them, saw that Jack's words were true, and again hid her face in her hands. "Don't look, Jack, don't! It's too terrible."

"I can't help it, Christie, I must!" he whispered.

She said no more. She knew the horrible fascination that was upon him. She would have given worlds to rise and flee, taking him with her, but she felt rooted to the spot.

"They're a-swingin' 'em up, shore enough, Christie," he said, in a voice so unlike his own that she would never have recognized it. "There! oh, I can't bear it, Christie."

He fell down beside her and hid his face on her shoulder. Some moments passed in which each could hear the beating of the other's heart. Christie moaned and wept. Jack shuddered and trembled as if with an ague fit. After an agony of waiting, there came the sound of a stifled shriek, a heavy thud, a confused murmur of voices, and, after a time, the sound of horses' feet. When they found the courage to look up, two still forms were dangling from the old tree, and the black phantoms were riding slowly away into the dark forest.

"Oh, those awful, awful faces," moaned Christie. "I'll never forget them while I live. Jack, I don't like your Texas one bit."

"I never knowed 'em to do anything nigh this bad berfo', Christie," he humbly replied.

Slowly and sorrowfully they made their way back to the house. On the veranda they found General Royston, his white face looking almost ghostly in the moonlight. "It's all over, Christie," he said sadly.

"A band of masked men took them out of our hands and now, I suppose"—he stopped with a shudder.

"We know, father," said Jack, huskily. "We seen 'em."

"God help them," said General Royston. "They are now in His hands, and, happily, He judges not as man judges." He bared his head, the silvery hair shining like a halo about it in the moonlight, reverently folded his hands and sent up a silent appeal to that Higher Power which alone could bring good out of this great evil. As Christie noted the workings of the delicate features, the trembling of the slender fingers, and the glistening of the great tears in the sad eyes, she felt how cruel had been the fate that had forced this tender, noble soul into its recent straits.

"Uncle, why did you leave Virginia?" she impulsively asked.

He smiled as he answered her. "I often find myself wondering why, Christie. I had there a good home with such comforts as I can never hope to have here. Still, I do not regret leaving them; neither does your aunt. We have found here a wider sphere of usefulness, and it is better for our boys to grow up with the country and assist in its development than to have remained there to travel on in the same well-worn ruts made by their ancestors. I love our people here, and would do anything to advance their interests. Many a rare jewel is to be found among them, rough as is its setting."

Christie could not help thinking that he saw them through a lens furnished him by his own simple, child-like nature, but she felt the grandeur of this beautiful faith in his fellow-men. "Surely this very fact must go far toward establishing among them a higher

standard of excellence as to conduct and character," she thought. 'A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.' My uncle is right. Here is his proper sphere of action, and, quiet as he is, he cannot fail to leave the impress of his own nobleness upon those about him. As for him,

'The strawberry grows underneath the nettle,
And wholesome berries thrive and ripen best
Neighbored by fruit of baser quality.' "

Jack, worn out with excitement, yawned, said he believed he was sleepy, and, bidding them good-night, went up-stairs.

"Do you know, Christie," said her uncle when they were left alone, "I believe the leader of this band to have been Julian Lambert? I think he became alarmed lest Alden might confess and disclose more of his own dark deeds than he chooses to be known, and so he resolved to get the prisoners out of the way."

This suspicion was confirmed when, two days afterward, Jack, examining the scene of the tragedy with all a boy's curiosity, found hidden under the leaves a crumpled piece of paper on which was written, evidently in a disguised hand, these words: "I have discovered that there is a plot on foot for you and Alden to be taken out to-night for the pretended purpose of execution. Do not be alarmed; it will be done only to frighten you that A. may be induced to confess. Brace up his shrinking courage. Don't let him 'peach.' Keep quiet, and all will yet be well."

The meaning of this was very clear to General Royston. He was convinced that it had been written by Julian Lambert, but he had not the slightest proof

that it was so. Upon consultation with Mr. Linton, they were forced reluctantly to give up the idea of bringing the miscreant to justice. "The mills of the gods grind slowly," said Mr. Linton. "Only wait, and this man will yet meet with his just deserts."

Out there, under the gnarled and misshapen old black-jack, are two neglected graves. They are nameless, unmarked save by a heap of stones cast upon them in derision by the passing school-boys. Thus they express their abhorrence of the crime of those who lie beneath, even as do the Jewish youths their execration of the memory of David's rebellious son.

Their glad shouts of laughter are hushed as they approach the fatal spot, and their voices lowered as they tell to their shrinking girl companions the story of "the bad men who tried to persuade the negroes to kill all the white people." They tell, too, how the waters of a well hard by, once sweet and clear, became bitter and black as ink on that awful night when two trembling human souls, unshriven by Christian priest, with no friendly hand to bid them God speed upon their journey, were sent forth to explore the mysteries of the dread Beyond, whose dark secrets no man can know and live. The curbing has long ago fallen into decay, and over the rude heap of logs hastily thrown across its yawning mouth a creeping vine has spread itself, a shapely mound of emerald, with the scarlet trumpet-flower flaming here and there. "But don't touch them—they're poisonous," say the affrighted children, and they stand and watch the snakes, toads, lizards, and other repulsive things which have made their home amid all this splendor of beauty, and wonder that it should be so. Negroes whisper together of "ha'nts" and strange goblin shapes to be seen in the

little glade when the moon is full—black-robed spectres with ghastly white faces, dancing about two grinning skeletons with clanking chains upon their limbs. On stormy nights, too, they hear stifled shrieks, cries, and groans, mingling with the hoarse hoot of the owl, and the demoniac yelling of wolves.

But though the place seems shunned and accursed of man, nature has been kind. The birds sing as sweetly there as in the neighboring woods, and the cattle lie in dreamy repose under the shade of the trees. The breezes of spring whisper softly above the lonely graves, and the solemn winds of autumn sing for their inmates such a funeral dirge as was never yet chanted by man. Through the torrid heats of summer the old tree, a mass of green, bends protectingly over them, and later, when the winds grow chill, sends down a shower of gently-falling leaves to cover them with a carpet of richest crimson, purple and gold. Then when the fierce blasts of winter have swept them bare, the pitying snow-angel, in her journeyings to and fro upon the earth, never forgets to cast over them her mantle of down. Gentle showers from Heaven water the bit of earth upon which no friendly tear has fallen, and around and about it bright flowers joyously lift their innocent faces to the sky.

Once only some of these familiar offerings to the dead were laid there by a human hand. Little Ginny Royston, moved by an impulse of divine compassion, brought some heart's-ease, and placed a cluster upon each grave. "Maybe their mammas would like for somebody to do it," she said to Jack, whom she had persuaded to accompany her to the fearsome spot. "I asked God to take care of 'em an' not let 'em be

hung," said the child, as she laid her little offering reverently upon the lonely mounds, "but He didn't hear me. I must a-done somethin' bad that day." No, Ginny, little innocent, it was not your doing—that awful deed. Only He to whom all things are known can tell why He permitted it. And so, the flowers were left to molder there, as, beneath, hidden away from all earthly eyes, were the bodies of those hapless, misguided ones who, at some time in their lives, had been, even as she was now—a mother's darling.

CHAPTER V.

A MODERN DON QUIXOTE.

THE Sunday following the foregoing events dawned clear and beautiful. A gentle shower during the night had left a dewy freshness in the air very grateful to the senses after the protracted heats of summer. Christie came down, looking as rosy as the morning itself, in a white muslin with fluttering pink ribbons at the throat and waist.

"Hello, Chris! goin' to meetin' to-day?" called out Jack.

"I think not, if Mr. Nicholls is to preach."

"Don't like the parson, hey?"

"Oh, yes, I like him well enough, but I can't say that I particularly admire his style of eloquence."

"I think you are very right to stay at home, Christie. I never go to hear him," said Max, with dignity.

"Oh, you! of course not!" retorted Jack. "You won't listen to any of 'em 'at ain't swallowed the dictionary. Now I think it's the bigges' fun in the worl' to hear the parson, an' I'm a-goin' to-day, an' I think you ought to go too, Chris."

"Why?"

"Oh, well, Mat Banks was a-tellin' me yisterday 'at the folks was all a-sayin' 'at you hadn't showed yourself nowher's sence you turned the Yankee teacher a-loose, an' 'at they reckined you was ashamed to let

'em see your face after whut you'd done. I want you to show 'em 'at they're mistaken."

"That would be a very unworthy motive to take me to church, Jack. I am not afraid of their ultimate decision concerning me. They'll do me justice before long."

Jack changed his tactics. "Please go with me, Christie. I want you to go so bad. 'Tuin't half the fun when you ain't there."

"Do you mean to say you go to church just for fun, Jack?" she asked, severely.

"Oh, well, I didn' mean that exackly. You do pick up a feller's words so, Chris! The long an' short of it is, I want you to go to meetin' with me to-day. Will you do it?"

"And how about the fleas?" she asked, laughingly. "The last time I was there, they routed me completely, 'horse, foot, and dragoons.'"

"Oh, they won't pester you to-day," he answered, eagerly. "Us boys put a waggin' load o' pennyr'yal under the 'cademy, t'other day. You can smell it when you git in-a hunderd yards of it."

"Pennyr'yal!" exclaimed Max, contemptuously. "You learned that from Eb. Banks, I suppose. When will you begin to speak correctly, Jack?"

"Oh, I don' make no purtense o' speakin' proper like you do, an' you know it, Max."

Christie, willing to cut short this little war of words, and seeing how anxious Jack really was for her to accompany him, consented to do so.

"I'll go, if it will afford you so much pleasure," she said to him.

"Hooray! I knowed you would. You're jest a trump ef ever there was one, Chris."

Gen. Royston was absent from home, and Ginny was a little ailing, so that her mother could not leave her ; consequently, Jack and his cousin were the only representatives of the family at church that day. On the way to the village, they were somewhat startled by the sudden scurrying of some animal's feet in the bushes by the road-side. A moment afterward, the tinkle of a sheep-bell enlightened them as to the origin of the sound.

"It's the Don," said Jack. "Somebody's let him out o' the pastur'. I wish they hadn't a-done it, fur now he'll be a-tryin' to foller me ter meetin'."

The Don was a pet sheep of Jack's, the terror of the children of the neighborhood from his belligerent propensities. These had been developed at an age at which he should have been the meekest and mildest of lambs. When Jack had been at a loss for a name worthy of so marked a character, Mr. Bradford had suggested that of "Don Quixote."

Jack, who always liked to get at the root of matters, at once asked the significance of such a queer name, whereupon he heard for the first time the story of the chivalrous old Spanish cavalier. "The real Don Quixote went about the world tilting at wind-mills," his teacher had continued, "and your Don tilts at any and everything that comes in his way. He evidently has set himself to rectify all the abuses of the neighborhood."

The name was sufficiently high-sounding to please Jack's fancy, and he readily adopted it, but as it proved too much of a mouthful for most of his play-fellows, it had been gradually contracted into "The Don." He was known to all the community—only too well, indeed, for he had been voted a public nuisance

and condemned to be kept "in durance vile" for some weeks past. This unwarrantable restriction of his liberties only made him the more ripe and ready for mischief now, and Christie was forced into rather an undignified quickness of movement in order to avoid what might have been the very disagreeable consequences of a sudden charge he made upon her. Fortunately, there was a stump of a tree near at hand, perched upon which she was secure from his attacks. She could even afford to join in Jack's merriment at the furious onslaughts of her enemy upon the stump itself.

"I'll let him butt it out, Christie," said he; "then, maybe, he'll be willin' to behave hisself fur the rest o' the day."

"If you think there's no danger of my castle's being demolished," she answered, a little doubtful of his strategy. "I can feel it tremble under each blow. The Don is a regular battering-ram."

"He is that," said Jack proudly, "an' that he's been ever sence he was a baby."

At last the Don, exhausted by his useless efforts, gave up the siege, and lay panting from his labors. "Come now, Chris, berfo' he gits up steam ag'in. I wish I had time to drive him to the pastur', but it's a-gittin' late an' we'll have to hurry on. I reckon maybe he'll keep still tel meetin's over," he said, regarding him very dubiously, however, as they moved away.

The church was well filled as, indeed, was usually the case. Groups of men sat about the doors chewing tobacco, whittling sticks and talking in subdued tones. In-doors the women were assembled, discussing various topics, and—tell it not in Gath—"dipping snuff!"

A momentary silence ensued upon Christie's entrance. Gossip was suspended, and tooth-brushes well laden with a brown, powdery substance, were held in mid-air as she made her way to her seat. She felt the blood surge into her cheeks as she observed knowing looks, nods and winks exchanged among some of the members of the congregation. She thought herself the object of universal animadversion, but in this she was mistaken. There were many who admired the course she had taken in releasing Mr. Bradford quite as much as Eb. Banks had done. The teacher had made many warm friends in spite of his Northern peculiarities, and these secretly rejoiced at his escape. Even those who were inclined to condemn her were less harsh in their judgment of her conduct than she supposed.

Her painful confusion must have been apparent, for Mrs. Banks, who sat near her, after quietly greeting her with a pleasant smile and a "Howdy-do, Chris," continued her conversation with her next neighbor, in which she gave a circumstantial account of the sufferings of her young son, Peter, from "catin' ov a big bait o' watermillions an' they soured on his stummick an'"——but we are not as much interested in the consequences of Peter's rash act as was his fond mother's open-mouthed listener.

Soon the buzz of voices was again heard, and the brushes were mopped and rubbed as vigorously as ever. In the curiosity to hear what "she says ter me, s'she," and "I says ter him, says I," Christie seemed so wholly forgotten that she had time fully to recover her composure. "Parson" Nicholls, as he was called by his flock,—he was of the "Hard-shell" Baptist persuasion—soon entered, laid his hair-covered, leathern saddle-

bags carefully against the wall, removed his hat and hung it on a peg above them, took out his red silk handkerchief, wiped his face, and blew a blast from his nose which Jack afterwards compared to "Gabe's last trump;" then he seated himself on a hide-bottomed chair just back of one of the school-desks, tipped it against a convenient pillar in his rear, crossed his legs and propped his foot on the lower round of his chair, looked around him and groaned as dismally as though his conscience were burdened with the united sins of the whole assembly. Then he closed his eyes and seemed rapt in thought.

"Pa's'n's a-stedyin' up his sermint now," whispered Mrs. Banks to her neighbor. An old gentleman in the "amen" corner of the church, dressed, as was his pastor, in a suit of dingy brown jeans, now began in a quavering voice to sing, "I'm boun'fur the promersed lan'." One by one, other voices joined themselves to his, until every degree of shrillness was represented. The singing of this hymn was the signal for the men outside to enter the church. They filed in, each affectionately nursing his Sunday hat, the younger ones casting furtive glances towards the ladies' side of the house to discover where their sweethearts might be sitting, with a view to the selection of their own seats. Jack took up his position near an open window, almost opposite Christie. He wanted a good view of her face. Half his "fun" in listening to the worthy parson was derived from the pleasure of watching the play of her expressive features, though this fact was wholly unsuspected by her.

The hymn ended, Parson Nicholls rose, gave out in a sing-song tone another, line by line, with no perceptible pause between the repetition of the words and

their rendition into song. Then followed a prayer, in which the words were so mumbled and jumbled that Christie caught the meaning of one only now and then. The secret of this was an enormous quid of tobacco snugly stowed away in one of the parson's cheeks. After this, another "voluntary" from the "choir," during the singing of which he sat with his chair thrown back, his limbs extended to their full length, his hands clasped behind his head, his eyes closed in ecstasy as he rolled the sweet morsel from side to side in his mouth, stopping only to eject a stream of tobacco-juice upon the floor, which he was careful to rub well in with one of his feet. When silence again reigned, he rose from his seat, removed the quid from his mouth, deposited it upon one corner of the desk for future use, fetched a groan both loud and long, and proceeded to the chief business of the day.

"My frien's," he said, "I hadn' made up my min' whut ter say ter ye, ter-day,—es ye knows hit's al'ays my custum jest ter say whut the Sperit put inter my mouth an' nothin' else;—well, es I wur a-sayin', I hadn' made up my min' whut ter talk ter ye erbout tel es I wur a ridin' erlong a-thinkin' o' nothin' in pertickler, somethin' said ter me right in one o' my yeers, 'An' God called her wo'—Jest then, ole Pete, he stumped his toe an' down he come on his knees, au' es I wur a-sayin' ov the words out loud atter the Sperit, in my 'stonishment I kep' on a-sayin', 'wo-o-o-o-man!' Then es Pete he ris up fum his lowly postur', it come ter me whut it all meant. My frien's,"—this with the greatest solemnity of tone—" 'twa'n't no accerdunt—that stumpin' o' ole Pete's toe;—no, sir! Twur done ter tell me the message I wur ter give ye ter-day. An' God called her wo-man, which, bein'

interpreted, my bruthring an' sistring, means 'wo be unto man !'" Then followed a long list of unfortunate women, whose peccadilloes are mentioned in the Bible—mother Eve, "Derlily," and "Jezerbul" figuring extensively among them, until he came down to more modern times. All the ills to which flesh is heir were, according to him, due to this beguiling creature who brought only woe to man. He administered a gentle rebuke to "sister Smith" for "a-gittin' ser monst'ous rampageous 'at she wanted ter be a-med-dlin' with whut in the natur' o' things wur the bus'ness ov the men." To her credit be it spoken, she bore it meekly, offering no defense of her conduct. A tear even forced its way from her faded eyes, and, gliding downward, hung, a glittering dew-drop, at the end of her long, withered nose. Who will say that it was not as precious in the sight of the angels as the "pearl of the Peri?"

Flushed with his success in this quarter, the parson now directed his batteries upon another point. He was not one to flinch from the rebuking of sin in high places—not he ! and Christie, altogether unsuspecting of what was coming, was forced to listen to a long tirade, of which her own recent exploit formed the theme, the "dressin' ov herself in men's clo'es" seeming to be the chief cause of grievance. Now, the parson's methods in preaching were peculiar. He always closed his eyes at the beginning of his sermon, and scarcely opened them until it was finished. This was done, as Jack explained to her, the better to catch the words "the Sperit" was supposed to be whispering into his ear. Then, as he grew heated with his argument—he was "great on argyfyin'," he was accustomed to say of himself, with much compla-

cency,—he would throw off his coat and toss it behind him, careless of where it went. Soon his vest would follow. Finally, he would unbutton his shirt-collar, laying bare his brawny chest, and fiercely roll up his sleeves above his elbows. All this time, he would sway his lank body back and forth, shake his head in savage defiance of those who might be inclined to dispute his opinions, and, doubling up his fists, pound the desk in front of him until it danced about as if possessed by the spirits.

This plan had been strictly followed on the occasion of poor Christie's castigation. Jack looked black as a thunder-cloud, and was biting his lips and clenching his fists in impotent wrath, when suddenly he heard a sound which, in the twinkling of an eye, changed the whole expression of his countenance. It was only the tinkle of a sheep-bell.

Glancing out of the window, he saw the Don looking up innocently into his face. He made some mysterious signal, at which the sheep gravely shook his head, walked quietly to the door, mounted the steps, and marched sedately up the aisle. The parson was too much engaged to observe his movements, and no one dared to put him out, knowing that a scene would inevitably ensue, whereas, if no notice was taken of him, the probabilities were in favor of his returning to the woods without creating a disturbance. Jack knew better, but wisely held his peace. Don Quixote advanced in a stately and dignified manner altogether worthy of his name, until he had reached a point immediately in front of the gesticulating parson. Here he paused to investigate the meaning of that worthy's antics. Only an infinitesimal space of time was necessary for him to make up his mind. The

parson evidently intended to challenge him to battle, and that was a summons the Don had never yet been known to disregard. A few steps backward, a lowering of the head, a vision of a ball of wool flying through the air, a glimpse of a pair of feet encased in stout brogans above the desk, and the parson lay sprawling on the floor under the wreck of that piece of furniture. The Don was outside the building, peeping in at the door with the most innocent face imaginable.

Christie looked at Jack. He was rolling on the floor, pounding it with his fists, kicking with all his might, almost ready to explode with the merriment he must repress. Hysterical laughter was heard here and there, and many faces were convulsed in the effort at self-control. Two staid elders advanced to the prostrate parson, assisted him to rise, and attempted to remove the traces of the disaster. This was not so easily done, as a bottle of ink left in the desk by some careless school-boy, had emptied its contents upon his reverend person, bespattering his face, shirt and trousers, to their irretrievable injury. The look of bewilderment on his face was most ludicrous to see. "Wur hit the devil?" he whispered, but loud enough to be heard all over the room.

"I dunno, brother Nicholls, but whut hit wur," said uncle Tommy Skilton, who was tenderly assisting his beloved pastor to rearrange his disordered dress. "Sometimes I think the devil air in the creetur the way he do go on. Will some o' the sistring let us have some pins?" he asked, looking helplessly and piteously toward them.

Sister Smith came to the rescue. "Aha! brother Nicholls, the women is some ercount fur somethin', atter all, is they?" she could not refrain from saying.

"Don't be too hard on a man when he's down, sister Smith," answered the parson, humbly. "This air a less'n sent ter me, an' hit's one I'll not furgit. I'll go home an' tell my ole lady all erbout hit, an' I won't never say nothin' agin ye women-folks no mo'; —on'y this much I mus' say, an' I won't never gin in, fur I've got Saint Paul ter back me in hit,—'at the man, he air the head o' the woman, an' she'd oughter gin him his proper respec's."

By this time, order was somewhat restored, the Don had retired majestically from the scene of his victory, and now lay enjoying the cool breezes under the shade of a tree. The parson made a faint effort to go on with his discourse, but soon desisted. "The Sperit" had deserted him. Sydney Smith, who, it may be conceded, had some experience in these matters, has said : "The cry of a child, the fall of a book, the most trifling occurrence, is sufficient to dissipate religious thought, and to introduce a more willing train of ideas ; a sparrow fluttering about the church, is an antagonist which the most profound theologian in Europe is wholly unable to overcome." What are these to the Don's performance ? The parson gave it up. His voice was weak and his knees a trifle shaky. He soon dismissed the people to their homes.

"The Don killed two birds with one stone to-day, Chris," whispered Jack as they were making their way out of the crowded house—"paid the pars'n out fur his imperdence to you an' fur drinkin' up my bottle o' ale t'other day, too."

They had to pass near him in order to reach the door. Christie could scarcely refrain from laughing as she noted his wobegone appearance, yet she felt a certain sympathy for his misfortunes which must have

been apparent in her face—Jack often said, “It wa’n’t no use to ask Christie whut she was a-thinkin’; a feller jest had to look in her face to know ;”—at any rate, she was surprised at seeing a horny, toil-hardened hand held out to her and a friendly smile upon the ink-bespattered face. “Howdy-do, Christie,” he said. “I hope ye don’t b’ar no grudge agin a ole feller jest fur tryin’ ter do whut he thought wur his juty. Maybe so, I wur wrong—maybe so, I wur a little too hard on ye. The Don, he thought so anyhow, an’ didn’ make no bones o’ tellin’ me so, nuther. Well, he got the best o’ the argyment ter-day, I’m ’bleeged ter ’low ter that, an’ I hope I’ve l’arnt es much by comin’ ter meetin’ this mornin’ es any ov ’em ’at I’ve been a-tryin’ in my pore way ter preach ter.”

Christie looked at the honest old face, and all trace of her recent annoyance faded away as she cordially grasped his hand. “But what would have become of me if the Don hadn’t seen fit to fight my battles for me ?” she asked, mischievously.

There was an answering twinkle in his own eyes as he said, “The Lord on’y know whar I’d a-landed ye, Chris. I wur a-gittin’ powerful worked up erbout ye, an’ no mustake. I reckon I’d a-had ye in a purty warm place by this time.”

“Oh well, now that we’ve buried the hatchet, won’t you go and dine with us? My aunt will be glad to have you, I am sure.”

“I’d like ter powerful. Mis’ Royston, she do give monst’ous good dinners, shore ; but bless yer soul, I ain’t fitten ter go nowher’s ter-day. I’ll ha’ ter git on home an’ I think my old lady, she’ll ha’ ter duck me in the goose-pon’ an’ scrub my face with a corn-cob inter the barg’in.”

"Every evil deed brings its own punishment, you know."

"Well, well," he returned, laughing and shaking his head at her, "ye better go 'long home now whilst I'm in a good humor with ye. Ef ye git too sassy, I mought take back whut I said jest now. An' look here, Jack, my frien', see to hit 'at ye have that buttin' ram o' yourn put up in the pastur' agin I come roun' ter preach nex' time, or I'll ha' ter sue ye fur damiges, shore."

This threat was uttered in such a good-natured tone that all the sting was taken out of it, and Jack afterwards declared it as his opinion that the parson had enjoyed the Don's escapade as much as any of the amused spectators.

"All right, Mr. Nicholls," he answered, his broad, moon-face still shining with a glow of suppressed merriment. "He sha'n't bother you no more."

As Christie was turning away she found her hand again caught up, and given a pressure more vigorous than agreeable. "I jest wanted ter ax yer pard'n, Miss Christie, fur sayin' whut I done ter ye t'other day," said Mrs. Smith, another tear of repentance—or was it the same?—clinging to the end of her nose. "Ye see, I wur kinder excited an' wa'n't at myself adzackly."

"Oh, that was nothing, Mrs. Smith. Don't give it another thought. I saw how it was with you."

"I've been teached a less'n too," she continued, gulping down a sob. "I ain't half es good es I thought I wur. I'd a-been a murderer ef they'd a-let me."

"We all do things when under the influence of

passion of which we wouldn't have thought ourselves capable," said Christie, soothingly.

"Yes, yes, hit's watch an' pray, watch an' pray all the time, else ole Satun's shore ter git the upper han' ov us," she sighed. "Hit's mighty good ov ye ter furgive a body this-a-way, Miss Christie."

"Think no more of it, I beg of you," answered Christie.

"So you leave the meetin' in peace an' harmony with all the world, Chris," said Jack, as they were starting homeward. "Thank me fur bringin' of you, will you?"

"Mornin', Miss Christie. Mornin', Jack," they heard some one say. "A nice day we're-a-havin', Miss Christie."

Christie, looking up, saw beside her Tobe Hawkins, the beau, *par excellence*, of the neighborhood. He was not a handsome young man, though he could never have been convinced of that fact. Scarcely a family within several miles of Cairo, boasting a marriageable daughter, but was the owner of a daguerreotype of this fascinating swain. His chief business in life seemed to be "the havin' ov his picture tuk," and the distribution of those precious articles among the girls of his acquaintance, all of whom he deemed hopelessly enamored of his manifold charms. Having ensnared all the smaller game, he now aspired to something higher. "Now 'at that darned Yankee school-teacher's out o' the way, I reckon a feller kin have some chance," he had been heard to say to one of his cronies.

He was dressed in the height of style according to his own ideas, his black broadcloth trousers stuffed into a pair of long cavalry boots, a white coat and vest

with massive watch-chain and numerous "charms" dangling, showy studs in his shirt-bosom, and a glittering cluster of brilliants in his crimson cravat. A broad-brimmed straw hat was set above his well-oiled locks, and he carried a huge blue cotton umbrella, kindly including Christie under its shelter as he stood beside her. In his presence she was always chiefly conscious of his front teeth. They were large and projecting, his short upper lip being wholly inadequate for its intended purpose. Jack, in one of his brilliant sallies of wit, had once said, "Tobe Hawkins was the hardes'-hearted feller he ever knowed;—he even turned his own teeth out o' doors." As for Christie, they never failed to bring back to her one of the experiences of her childhood when, with palpitating heart, and eyes dilated with mingled wonder and fear, she had listened to mammy Judy's recital of the tragic story of little Red Riding-hood. "Grandmama, what makes your teeth so big?" We all know the answer to that innocent question, and some such catastrophe seemed imminent to Christie when this all-powerful lady-killer would bend his awful gaze upon her. To his remark about the weather, she now made a pleasant reply, supposing that he merely meant to exchange the compliments of the day and pass on.

She was soon undeceived, however, as he persisted in walking by her side, smiling and smirking in a way that displayed his teeth—they were much discolored from the use of tobacco, by-the-way—to better advantage than ever. Clearly it was his intention to walk home with her. Moreover, in all probability, he would remain to dinner, spend the entire afternoon, and, possibly, a portion of the evening as well. Her heart sunk within her as the dismal prospect rose

before her. What was she to do? At home, in Virginia, she would not have hesitated for a moment. Indeed, there her forbearance would never have been put to such a test, but here in this democratic country, where were absolutely no grades of society, she would incur not only his displeasure, but that of his friends and acquaintances as well, if she refused his escort to her home. And then he had not asked her permission—that was not his custom. He took it for granted that she would feel honored by the bestowal of his society upon her, and expected her, as a matter of course, to accept it in all gratitude. Her face was a study as these perplexing thoughts passed through her mind, and Jack's was a queer mixture of fun and indignation. At last he said, "Well, Christie, as long as you've got company I'll jest go on ahead of you an' hunt up that everlastin' Don, an' take him back to the pastur'." He caught her look of comical despair at this proposal to leave her to the tender mercies of her admirer, and tried to telegraph her his purpose in doing so, but she failed to catch his meaning.

"I reckon ye've thought strange o' my not payin' ye no more attention sence ye've been out here, Miss Christie," said Mr. Hawkins, when Jack was out of earshot, "but I al'ays b'lieve in lettin' a feller have fa'r play in these things, ef he ain't nothin' but a Yankee school-teacher, an' while that Bradfud wur aroun' I didn' want ter git in his way. I knowed in reas'n I could knock him higher'n a kite any day 'at I'd say the word, but he wur sorter delerkit-like, an' I didn' think hit'd be adzackly the right thing ter do. Howsomever, now 'at's he's gone, an hit's ter be hoped hain't a-goin' ter come back no more, I don't see no

reas'n why me an' you can't have es much o' one ernother's comp'ny es we wants."

Why not, indeed ! As he said this, striding along with the air of a conqueror, Christie's memory, which often played her such whimsical tricks, brought to her mind the words,

" He spoke, and awful bends his sable brows,
Shakes his ambrosial curls and gives the nod,
The stamp of fate, and sanction of the god:
High heaven with trembling the dread signal took,
And all Olympus to the centre shook."

She found herself unconsciously holding her breath in awed expectation of some such dire event, so profoundly was she impressed by the sublimity of the man's egotism. She could scarcely collect her scattered senses to make a reply to his astounding assertion. She was so stunned with bewilderment that her tongue seemed paralyzed. She could only give him a glance of helpless appeal, which should have touched his soul to the quick. And so it did, but not in the way she meant. Before she was aware of his intention, he had caught up her hand and given it a squeeze she never forgot.

"That look's ernough, Christie," he said, softly. "Silunce al'ays give consent, an'"——stooping suddenly, the great teeth shone before her startled vision, and she felt that in another moment the fate of poor little Red Riding-hood might indeed be hers ; but, roused at last from her stupefaction, she snatched her hand from his grasp, sprang back as if from a viper, and gazed haughtily upon him.

"If you are so skilled in reading my face, sir, will you understand me when I add the words, Go and

leave me, and never dare to speak to me again?" The brown eyes were now black with indignation, and the fair face filled with a fierce wrath.

"I—I—I didn' mean ter make ye mad, Miss Christie," he faltered, piteously. "I—I thought"—but what he thought she was doomed never to know. At that moment there was a rushing sound in the bushes, a snort, and out came the Don in full career. Christie had scarcely more than a glimpse of him as he sent her too-fervent admirer flying into a mud-puddle near at hand, and then vanished into the woods on the opposite side of the road. Jack appeared upon the scene in a suspiciously short time after this occurrence, and with many expressions of sympathy assisted the crest-fallen dandy to his feet.

"It was too bad o' the Don, Tobe, I declare! I'll ha'ter make mutt'n o' that sheep yet. The oudacious rascal, to go an' spile your Sunday-go-to-meetin's fur you that-a-way! An' you jest oughter see your face! I don't mean to hurt your feelin's nor nothin' by laughin', Tobe, but ef you'll jest look in the glass when you git home you'll ha'ter laugh a little yourself. Never min'! we'll go right on, an' Max an' me'll have you fixed up all right in less'n no time."

"No," said Mr. Hawkins, sulkily, "I'll not go home with yeter-day, an' I give ye fa'r warnin', Jack, ef ye don't keep that ram whar he b'long, ye'll fin' him come up missin' one o' these days."

So saying, he turned on his heel and left them. Jack sat down on the ground, propped himself against a tree, and laughed until Christie became anxious lest he might do himself some bodily injury. "Lemme laugh it out, Chris," he said, in reply to her remonstrances. "I ain't had a fair chance sence I went into

the meetin'. Ho, ho ! thought he'd kiss you, did he ? Ha, ha ! Ho, ho !"

"Oh, Jack, you didn't see that?" she cried, in real distress.

"Whut's the reason I didn't, I'd like to know ? Wa'n't me an' the Don hid in the bushes a-waitin' an' a-watchin' fur you ? I didn' think it'd come to that pass, else I'd never a-left you, but I knowed he'd have to court you berfo' you git away from Texas or bu'st. The imperdence o' some folks beats me, shore ! Ho, ho !" and he went off into another fit of laughter as the ludicrous scene recurred to him.

"Jack, Jack," she said, piteously, "you won't tell, will you ?"

Jack pulled himself up with a sudden jerk, and looked grave. "I dunno about that, Chris. It's a heap too good to keep. I don't think I can promus."

"Oh, Jack, please."

"Then you'll have to be awful good an' tell me all your secrets an'—an'—gimme whut you wouldn' let Tobe Hawkins have," he concluded with a slight blush.

"Willingly ; not only one but a hundred, a thousand if you like," and she set to work to bestow them in so vigorous a manner that Jack was fain to cry for mercy.

"There ! there ! don't smother a feller to death, Chris ! You've towsled my head all up, an' pulled my kervat to pieces an'"—

"What's the meaning of these mysterious proceedings, may I ask ?" said a voice near them.

Christie's heart gave a great bound as she looked up ; then she instituted an attack upon the new-comer similar to that she had made upon Jack. "Oh, Champ, Champ ! I'm so glad you've come. When did you get back ? Where is father ?"

"One question at a time if you please, Missie. I have but just come and father is at my uncle's. I came out to look for you."

"You'd oughter a-come a little sooner," said Jack. "You'd a-seen"—but a pair of hands were suddenly placed over his mouth and an indignant voice cried, "Oh, Jack, Jack ! for shame to forget your promise so soon."

"But I didn' promus'," came in smothered tones from beneath the restraining hands. "You was in sech a awful hurry to kiss somebody bein' as you got cheated out of it with Tobe Hawkins, you wouldn' give a feller time."

"I see I'll have to sift this matter to the bottom," said Champney Royston, with mock severity.

"Make Chris tell you all about it," said Jack as she released him. "It's rich, I tell you ! You ain't seen nothin' in Mexerco to ekil it, I know. Well," he continued, "I know you an' Chris want to talk about all sorts o' things, so I'll hunt up the Don an' take him to the pastur'. Things is a-gittin' mos' too hot fur the gentleman."

Soon afterwards Christie and her brother saw him in the road ahead of them, astride the Don, clinging like a burr to the back of his refractory steed who made many ineffectual efforts to rid himself of his unwelcome burden. "It's no use, Don," they heard him say. "You may as well make up your min' to it.

All play an' no work ain't healthy fur nobody, not even a sheep like you."

"He's a queer chap," said Champney.

"He's just the dearest fellow in the world," rejoined Christie warmly.

"The very, very dearest?" questioned he, as he gazed smilingly but searchingly into her face.

Christie felt herself blushing and only blushed the more as she saw that her keen-eyed brother observed it. "Oh, Champ," she went on quickly, "I have so much to tell you," and straightway she plunged into the details of the recent exciting events. "Are you ready to disown your sister?" she asked, wistfully, when she had concluded her recital of the story of Felix Bradford's release.

"Well, no—not quite. That I could never do under any conceivable circumstances, my sister," putting his arm about her waist and affectionately kissing her. "Of course, I'm sorry that it was necessary for you to adopt such extreme measures, but I scarcely see how you could have done otherwise under the circumstances. Bradford is a noble fellow—fully worth the sacrifice of your maidenly scruples in his behalf."

"I hadn't intended that he should know I was not Max. Unfortunately, he recognized me."

"Never mind! he'll respect you none the less for the discovery. Have you heard nothing further from him?"

"Nothing."

"I fear you won't before we leave. We start for home in a few days."

He fell into a reverie from which he did not rouse himself until they were approaching the house, where

Christie saw her father and uncle sitting together in the hall. It was a happy reunion for all, yet tinged with pain for her who must so soon leave the kind relatives to whom she had become so strongly attached. Moreover, she did not like to go until she was assured of Felix Bradford's safety.

CHAPTER VI.

JACK BEGINS THE BATTLE OF LIFE.

THE night before Christie's departure, she had gone to her room soon after supper, to make some final preparations for her journey, as she would leave at an early hour on the morrow. These she had almost completed when she heard a tap at her door, which was slightly ajar, and Jack's voice came through the aperture. "May I come in fur a little while, Christie?"

"Certainly, come right in."

"I didn' know you was busy," he said, as he saw her kneeling before her trunk. "Maybe I'd better go back tel you've finished your packin'."

"No, it will only take me a few minutes now. You won't be in the least in the way."

He sat down, and waited patiently until she could give him her undivided attention. Then he drew up a chair for her beside his own near the window.

"I think I'll put out the light, now," said Christie. "It makes the room ever so much warmer, and attracts the insects besides."

"I secon' that motion, Chris. I want to have a long talk with you about myself. A feller ain't had no chance at you sence Uncle Dudley an' Champ have been here, an' somehow or 'rother I can al'ays git my mouth off better in the dark, anyhow."

Christie seated herself by his side, took his hand into one of her own, and with the other softly stroked

the sturdy, rebellious hair which, like that of Trad-dles, "would not down." Now Jack, in general, affected a supreme contempt for such demonstrations of affection, but he liked them nevertheless, and sat for some moments in silence, like a purring cat under the hand of its mistress, conscious only of the pleasurable sensations that were stealing over him.

"Well, what have you to tell me, my boy?" his cousin asked, gently.

"Oh, Christie, don't talk to a feller that-a-way, please! you make me as limber as a whalebone," he pleaded, his voice quivering just the least bit.

"Well, then, I won't. John Royston, tell me, what misdemeanor have you to confess to me now?"—this in the severest tone she could assume.

"Please, ma'am, I ain't been a-doin' nothin' 'tall, an' I ain't a-goin' ter do so no mo'," he whimpered, in ludicrous imitation of black Lottie, Ginny's playmate and companion in mischief. "But I'm in earnest, Christie," he continued, changing his tone into one of sober seriousness. "I want to tell you 'at father's consented to send me to school in Santa Rita this winter. I asked him to lemme go as I knowed there wa'n't no chance to git Mr. Bradford back here ag'in."

"I'm very glad to know this, Jack. You'll board in Santa Rita, of course?"

"Yes, at Judge Roy's. Father thinks it's too fur to go from home, an' Judge Roy says he's willin' fur me to stay at his house; him an' father's been sech good frien's always, you know."

"I am pleased to hear this, too, Jack—that you will be thrown into constant association with such refined, intelligent people as I know the Roys to be. Nothing could be better for you."

"That's jest whut I thought, an' as Judge Roy's a lawyer, an' I mean to make a lawyer o' myself, I think I can learn a heap from him jest by talkin' with him so much."

"So you are going to be a lawyer? I didn't know that. Let me predict a future for you, Jack! You'll be first the Judge's partner, then a judge like himself, and meantime you'll—yes, I think you will,—you'll marry the Judge's pretty little daughter."

"Why, Christie, how did you know? Who tol' you?" he asked, wonderingly. "'That's jest exackly whut I'm a-goin' to do, an' I ain't never tol' nobody."

Christie laughed. "I'm sorry I discovered your secret in this way, Jack. I spoke merely at random."

"Oh, well, it's jest whut I come to tell you, anyhow, so tain't no use to fret about it."

"And that's the reason you wanted the light out, eh, young man—to hide your modest blushes, was it?"

"I ain't a-blushin'," he stoutly affirmed. "'Tain't nothin' to be a-blushin' fur."

"That's true, Jack, my boy. It's a very worthy ambition—one of which you needn't be ashamed. But I didn't know that you had even made the little lady's acquaintance. When did you see her?"

"That day father sent me to town, you know. I was at Mr. Hirsch's, an' had jest bought the bottle o' ale the pars'n drunk up, when she come in an' wanted some candy. I hadn' never seen nothin' like her berfo', an' I kep' a-starin' at her so, she dropped her han'kercher'. I picked it up, an' then she let her candy fall. I picked that up, too, an' then I offered to carry it home fur her, an' she wouldn' lemme 'cause—'cause"——

"Because—out with it, Jack."

"Well, then, 'cause she thought ev'rybody'd laugh at her fur walkin' with sech a awful-lookin' boy as me. I didn' blame her fur that, so, when she got sorry fur me an' was a-goin' to lemme go with her, I wouldn't, but I jest follered on behind her tel I found out where she lived; an' it's the bigges', fines' house in town, too, Christie."

"Yes, I know."

"Well, I made up my min' then, Chris, 'at one o' these days I'd make her proud to be seen a-walkin' the streets with me, an' I said to myself, 'Your name's half mine a'ready, my little lady, an' some o' these times you'll be glad to stick the s-t-o-n to it.' Ain't you noticed, Christie, how much properer I've been a-talkin' ever sence that day?"

"I don't know that I have observed a very marked change, Jack, but perhaps that was only because my mind has been so much taken up with other matters."

"I've been a-mindin' my p's an' q's like the mischief, I tell you, an' I was in hopes you'd took notice of the improvement," he said, with a slight shade of disappointment in his tone. "I wish you could a-seen her that day, Christie," he broke out with a renewed burst of enthusiasm. "I thought she was a angel jest dropped out o' the sky."

"Ah Jack, there are not many earthly angels, you'll find. She's certainly very beautiful, and if only she's as good as beautiful she's a treasure worth any man's winning, but you mustn't expect perfection, or you'll be wofully disappointed."

"I know one angel," he asserted, very positively.

"Yes, dear Aunt Virginia."

"Mother? Oh, yes, she's a purty good ole angel,

but I wa'n't a-thinkin' o' her jest then. You know who I mean, Chris," awkwardly laying his arm about her neck and resting his head on her shoulder.

Christie was so touched by the unexpected caress that she felt the tears spring to her eyes. "If you mean me, Jack," she faltered, "you are very much mistaken—indeed you are. I am very faulty—I"—

Jack put his hand over her mouth. "You sha'n't abuse yourself no sech a way while I'm here to keep you from it, Chris. I know you're good or the thought o' you wouldn' a-kep' me out o' mischief so often. Many a time when I was about to go into some meanness with the other boys, I'd think 'Would Christie like fur me to do this?' an' then I jest couldn't. Then berfo' you come—don't hate me far it, please—father an' mother didn' know it, but I did swear awful sometimes. You see Eb. Banks swears that-a-way onct in a while, an' I thought it sounded so big an' mannish I got to doin' it too. Then he smoked an' chawed terbacker an' ev'rybody here done it, an' I got to doin' that too. I never will furgit how I felt one day when you liked to a-ketched me a-smokin'. I th'owed the ole cigarette away an' I ain't teched terbacker sence an' I ain't swore a oath sence you fust come. Jest berfo' Mr. Bradford went away he praised me fur quittin' both. I didn' know tel then 'at he knowed I'd ever done sech a thing, but he mus' a-had eyes all over his head fur he knowed ev'rything bad 'at a feller'd do. An' the way he'd talk to you, Christie, when he ketched you a-doin' wrong, was ernough to make you so awful ashamed o' yourself 'at you wouldn' never want to do so ag'in. Well, I jest owned up an' tol' him all about it—how it was you 'at made me quit an' all."

"Oh, Jack, you didn't!" She felt her cheeks tingling.

"Yes, I did too, an' he lis'ened like he was might'ly pleased an' when I got th'ough, he put his han' on my head an' said, 'You see, Jack, my boy, whut a powerful influence a good woman can exert, but they are not all like your cousin, I am sorry to say, an' a bad woman can do a great deal of harm. Try always to shun the bad ones, an' keep your heart open to the influence of the good. You can't go wrong ef you do that.'"

"That was very good advice, Jack."

"I know it was, an' I'm a-goin' to stick to it too. Christie," he went on presently, "it's my b'lief 'at that man fairly worshiped the groun' under your feet."

"What man?" she asked, a little constrainedly.

"Now you needn' be a-purtendin' you don't know. Why, Tobe Hawkins, of course!"

"Oh, Jack!"

The mingled reproach, indignation and disappointment were too much for him. "I was jest a-jokin', Christie; I didn' mean Tobe, an' you know it. You know who I do mean jest as well as I do. You mus' a-seen it, too. You couldn't help it."

"No, I don't know that I did."

"Well, I did, an' I kep' a-wishin' he'd tell you so. Did he, Chris?"

"No."

"Then I b'lieve it was 'cause he was poor an' he knowed you was rich. I've figgered it all out, an' that's the conclusion I've come to."

"Who would have thought you capable of solving such stupendous problems," she asked, gaily.

"Oh, you may laugh jest as much as you please, ole lady, but you can't deny-likin' Mr. Bradford yourself, else you'd never a-took all that trouble to help him git away."

"I think I'd have done that for any one who was in such danger, Jack."

"You didn' do it fur them po' fellers, Cross an' Alden," he triumphantly asserted.

"No, they were guilty. Mr. Bradford was innocent."

"You may put it that-a-way ef you want to, but I've got my erpinion all the same."

"You certainly have a right to that, Jack."

"Yes, an' you know I'm right, too. But I won't be mean enough to bother you about it no more, ole girl. He's the only man I know who's good enough fur you, an' you're the only woman I know who's good enough fur him. I hope you'll take a notion to make a match some day."

To this she made no reply. After a time he said, "Christie, would you min' ef I slip away in the mornin' without tellin' you good-by?"

"Yes, I think I would, very much."

"I'd ruther not."

"Why?"

"Oh, 'cause when I keer anything about people I don't like to tell 'em good-by, especial when they're a-goin' off so fur as you will. It—it hurts me, Christie!"

"For that very reason I think I would do it, if I were you. If we shrink from everything that's painful—if we indulge ourselves in escaping it whenever we can, it's liable to weaken the character and to lessen our power to overcome the disagreeables of life."

And then, it won't be so very long before we meet again. You're to go to Virginia in a year or two to school, you know."

"Yes; well, I reckon I'll have to face the music."

"To be sure you will, and you'll always do it. You're not one to shirk duty, Jack."

"I hope not, Christie."

"You are not. I know you better than you know yourself. I shall be very proud of my cousin, Judge John Royston, one day, Jack."

"Christie," said he, doubling his fists and clenching them tightly, "you make a feller feel like he can do anything when you talk to him that-a-way. Ef I ain't Judge Royston then it won't be fur lack o' tryin', I tell you that."

"That's my brave boy," she answered, stooping and kissing him on the forehead. "And now I think we'd better go to sleep. I must be up early to-morrow and have a long, fatiguing journey before me."

He voluntarily gave her a good-night kiss—something he had never done before, and went to his room. Christie's heart was filled with thanksgiving that, all unconsciously, she had been the means of helping this struggling soul out of darkness into the light. Then, too, his confident assertion of Felix Bradford's affection for herself, brought balm to her vexed, anxious spirit. A happy light was shining in her eyes as she fell asleep, even though the tears were trembling on her lashes.

Jack, true to his resolution, did not shrink from the trial of parting with his cousin the next morning. He was very brave throughout, only an unusual pallor in his face and a slight quivering of the lip giving evidence of the pain he felt when she kissed him good-

by. He did not dare to speak, merely giving a nod of assent when she said, "You must write to me often, Jack, and tell me all about yourself, just as if I were here with you."

As the carriage rolled away she looked back through tear-dimmed eyes, at the place where she had experienced so much of joy and sorrow with the vague feeling we all have known that perhaps she saw it for the last time. Jack was mounted on one of the gate-posts, and Ginny, clinging to the palings, looked wistfully after them. Her uncle, aunt and the servants were still standing where they had left them. Max had disappeared. She waved her handkerchief, and immediately Jack's broad-brimmed straw hat was off and waved in return. No wild whoop accompanied the act, however, as would have been the case under ordinary circumstances.

Then the carriage passed a turn in the road and they saw each other no more. Jack leaped to the ground and rushed up-stairs to his room, where, throwing himself face foremost upon his bed, he fought out his battle alone. For a time all seemed darkness before him. Life was not worth the living if Christie were not there to brighten it. After a time came the thought, "Whut'd she say ef she could see me now? She'd call me a cowurd, that's whut she'd do."

He rose, bathed his burning face, and sat down to think. Observing that the door between his room and hers was open, he started up and stood on the threshold looking in for some moments. How bare and desolate it seemed, robbed of all the pretty nothings which a woman of taste never fails to gather about her! A great lump rose in his throat and he turned away sick

and faint. He had scarcely tasted his breakfast, and now nature was having her revenge. He closed the door with a sharp bang and locked it. "I'll never go in there ag'in—I can't," he mentally exclaimed. Then he hesitated. "Christie wouldn't like fur me to do that-a-way," he thought, as he recalled what she had said to him the preceding night. He unlocked the door and returned to the deserted room. "How shall I ever get through this long day?" he wondered, and then at thought of the many long days to come his heart failed him.

He glanced out of the window. There was Jowler looking up wistfully at him. Turning, he saw his gun on its rack of deer's antlers, and it occurred to him that there would be no better way of killing time than to spend it in the woods shooting. As he was examining his gun to see that it was in proper order, the recollection of Violet Roy and his resolutions for the future recurred to him. "I can't do that an' hunt all my life, too," he thought. "I've got to begin work sometime—why not to-day?" The gun was again hung upon the wall and he picked up a dog's-eared Latin grammar. "Mr. Bradford said ef we'd study Latin right it'd teach us a heap about our own language. I want to learn to speak proper an' shorely Latin must be the thing, so, here goes."

He laid the book on the table, sat down before it, and leaning his elbows upon it, stuffed his fingers into his ears and began to con aloud the verb, "Amo." This voluntary deafness was a necessity with him. He was so peculiarly alive to every sound about him that he must have recourse to it in order to distract his attention from the outer world. He had no natural inclination for study. He was so healthy and

active that he delighted in motion and he had not yet been inducted into the pleasures of that other world which would gradually be opened to him. It was purely a sense of duty that impelled him to his present course. Presently, however, he was so fiercely assailed by the pangs of hunger that he was fain to go down-stairs and investigate the contents of the dining-room safe. His bodily wants thus supplied, he returned to the attack with renewed vigor, this time seated in Christie's room with her ambrotype—this was before the days of photographs—open on the table before him. For more than two hours his mother heard a low hum proceeding therefrom, which Ginny explained to her satisfaction as being "jest Jack git-tin' his lessons."

So our hero wrestled on in mortal combat with moods, tenses, gerunds and supines. "Whut's the use o' them things, anyhow, I'd like to know?" he said of the latter. At last he jumped up, the glow of victory on his face, closed his book and brought down his clenched fist upon it with a bang that made the creaky little table tremble and groan in piteous appeal for more kindly treatment. "I've got you now, ole 'Amo' an' I'll never let you git away from me ag'in." Then a knowing smile appeared upon his face. "I wonder ef the feller 'at made that book didn' put that verb a-purpose? He knowed the boys—an' the girls too, fur all they're so sly an' won't own to it—would learn it quicker'n any other. He was a sharp ole coon, I tell you." His mother smiled to hear him soon afterward cheerily whistling, "It is better to laugh than be sighing," as he came clattering down-stairs.

"Mother," he called out when he saw her, "I'in

a-thinkin' that cotton o' mine needs pickin', don't you?"

"I have been of that opinion for some time," she quietly answered.

"I tell you whut—I b'lieve I'll go to work an' pick it."

"You couldn't be better employed."

"Hello! Lottie, where's my basket?"

"Look for it yourself, my son."

"But I dunno where it is, mother."

"Then you should know. You can never succeed at anything you may attempt until you overcome those careless habits of yours, Jack."

"It's mighty easy fur women to talk," he grumbled. "They ain't got nothin' to do but jest to keep things in their places. A man can't be alays a-both-erin' about trifles—he'd never do nothin' else ef he did."

"He'd do everything with much greater ease and less loss of time, if only he were systematic, Jack."

"Where in the thunder has that everlastin' basket got to? Somebody's moved it, I jest know."

"You'll probably find it just where you left it."

"Oh, yonder it is—out behind the ash-hopper. Now you know I never put it there," he pettishly added. Then a guilty flush stole into his face as a sudden recollection came over him. "Yes, I did, too, mother. I remember, now." He started towards it, hesitated, and then came back. "Mother, ef Christie was here she'd say I wa'n't exackly respec'ful to you jest now. I know I do talk to you outrageous sometimes, but ef you'll jest furgive me, I'll try to turn over a new leaf from this on."

She looked up in surprise, then said gently, "I am

glad you intend to correct this habit, Jack—it is only a habit, I am sure. At heart I know you love and respect me, but I'll confess to you now that I have sometimes been pained by your careless words."

"Well, I'm a-goin' to change all that now, mammy," emphasizing his words with his usual bear-like embrace.

"There, there! run along now to your cotton before it gets so warm."

This cotton was in a "patch" which his father had given to him, the proceeds to be used as he liked, upon condition that he should hoe the young plants and gather the crop when made. He did not object particularly to the hoeing as it was done chiefly in the early morning hours or late in the afternoon, when the air was cool, but the picking was no such pleasant work, exposed as he was to the rays of a burning sun. His conscience smote him to-day as he saw much of it lying on the ground hopelessly ruined by the last rain. He knew that it might have been saved had he not yielded to his indolent habits. "As ef the crop wa'n't short ernough this year, anyhow, without my goin'an' lettin' it waste that-a-way," he said, reproachfully, to himself.

However, he made up his mind there would be enough left to buy him the new pair of boots he was determined to have before he went to Santa Rita, and in a few minutes, his mother heard him gaily whistling "Kitty Clyde," and other merry airs, subsiding at last as the heat and bodily weariness began to make themselves felt into the sentimental, "Ever of thee I'm fondly dreaming." Who knows what fairy visions of the future were floating before his eyes as he did so? He did not come in until the signal was given for the

field-hands to cease work for dinner and their accustomed noon-day rest. At dinner he did not once tease Ginny or her pet cat—something so unprecedented that she asked him “if he wasn’t sick or something.” When the meal was over he went to the book-case, took out a huge volume and sat down to read. His father, after a time, noting the knotted brows, glanced over his shoulder and was amused to find it a copy of Blackstone that was producing these heavy mental throes.

“Reading law, eh? Made up your mind to be a lawyer, Jack?”

He blushed scarlet. “I’ve been a-thinkin’ a little about it, father, but somehow or ’nother I can’t make no head nor tail to this feller. Whutever he’s a-drivin’ at, he knows better’n I do; ef he don’t then he’d better shet up shop, is all I’ve got to say about it.”

“I think you are going a little too fast, my son. You are taking the bull by the horns with a vengeance. Rome was not built in a day, remember.”

“That’s the hard part of it,” sighed Jack. “Ef a man could jest do whut he wanted to an’ be done with it, it’d be another thing.”

“Nothing is accomplished in this world without steady and persistent effort, my boy. You must be content to begin at the beginning—at the very lowest round of the ladder, and climb your way slowly upward. I think I’d let Blackstone rest just for the present. In a few years you will be surprised to find how simple and clear his meaning will be. There will be none of those dark mysteries that puzzle you now.”

“I wish you’d tell me whut to read, father. I’ve been a-wastin’ so much time I want to make up fur it now.”

"That I will do with pleasure, my son. We have a fairly-good library, quite sufficient for your wants. It is much better to read a few books, thoroughly mastering them, than to skim hastily over a greater number. Take one thing at a time, and learn it well. If you attempt too much at once, you will defeat your own purpose."

"I see ; you don't want me to be a ' Jack-at-all-trades, an' good at none.' "

"Yes," said his father, laughing, "that was just my meaning, though expressed somewhat differently. I was glad to see you gathering your cotton at last."

"Yes, sir, I'm ashamed o' myself, the way I've done about that."

"Well, go to work and make amends for your neglect."

"That's jest whut I'm a-goin' to do. I'm a-goin' right now."

"No, wait an hour. It is very warm in the sunshine, and you are not accustomed to such a lengthened exposure to it. If you get the chills, all your plans will be spoiled."

"Then will you pick out a book for me to read now, sir ?"

The book was found, and Jack went to work. Promptly at the expiration of an hour he was again in the field. As he was about to fall asleep that night, he said to himself, "It's no use a-talkin'—when a body's in trouble the best way to furgit it is jest to go right to work. I don't feel half so bad about Christie's goin' away as I did this mornin'. I think—I mos' know sho'd tell me I done right to-day ef she was here." He fell into the dreamless sleep which youth, health, and active, wholesome labor never fail to bring.

CHAPTER VII.

HOME AGAIN.

LEAVING Jack to carry out his life-plans as best he may, we will now follow Christie, whose future has grown misty with a cloud of harassing doubts and fears. "Do let's go by the post-office," she urged, as they drove into Cairo. Her brother readily understood the cause of her anxiety, but said nothing. "Let me get out and see Mrs. Gurney myself," she continued, as they stopped in front of the store which was post-office as well.

The post-mistress was a sharp-nosed, vinegar-faced woman, who, like Mrs. Gummidge, was "a lone, lorn creatur," and everything "went contrairy with her." The beauty of her countenance was not enhanced by the addition of green spectacles, over which gleamed her small ferrety eyes. They cast over the sallow complexion almost a ghastly hue. She had been deprived of the society of Mr. Gurney, not by death, nor yet by one of those mysterious occurrences which men call accidents, but by his sudden disappearance one dark night into the land of the unknown. She awaked the next morning to find herself alone. This fact, however, did not cause her much distress, being, indeed, rather a relief than otherwise, until she discovered that all his personal belongings, including his watch, Sal, the bay mare, and what ready money the family could boast had gone with him. Thereupon she raised an outcry against fate so loud and long that

her neighbors, in self-defense, interested themselves in her behalf, and managed to secure for her the office of post-mistress at Cairo.

This benevolent deed had long ago been repented in sackcloth and ashes, for scarcely a man dared to ask for his mail unless he had first fortified himself with a glass of whisky at the little corner grocery hard by. He well knew with what an avalanche of mental and bodily ills he would be overwhelmed when he ventured into her presence. Their sympathies had long been worn threadbare and they even went so far as to cite the vexations of which she was the cause as an excuse for the rapid increase of drunkenness among them. Since the days of mother Eve men have liked to say, "The woman—she gave me of the tree and I did eat." The example given in the chivalrous conduct of the progenitor of our race was one, forsooth, which his descendants have not been slow to follow. But though the morals of the whole neighborhood were thus imperilled, not a man dared to undo his own work and have her removed from the position to which she had been exalted. This even when there were whispered suspicions afloat that she sometimes subjected their letters to a private inspection before their delivery to their rightful owners. She seemed to consider this one of her inalienable privileges, and no one said her nay; he would have gone to the remotest western wilds and lived among the savage Comanches first. It was to this formidable personage that Christie had now the hardihood to present herself.

"Any letters for me, this morning, Mrs. Gurney?" she asked, so pleadingly that it might have softened a heart of stone.

She received a sharp glance from the beady eyes

and a snappish, "No, ye've sent for the mail twict a'ready sence we've had any. Ye know as well as I do 'at we don't have 'em but three times a week."

"But I thought perhaps you may have overlooked mine. Are you quite sure you haven't? Won't you please look again?"

This time she would have been stabbed to the heart could those eyes have performed the office. "Whut do ye take me fur? Do ye sposen I'd take the money fur my work if I didn' do it as it oughter be? I never seen anything like foolish young gyerls nohow! Al'ays expectin' letters an' goin' into connipation fits if they don't git 'em."

"I beg your pardon; I didn't mean to offend you," said Christie, as she turned to leave her. She did not see the look of cunning triumph concealed by the green spectacles. She could not guess with what an eager clutch the skinny hand closed upon a gold coin in her pocket received from Julian Lambert in exchange for a letter from Felix Bradford to Christabel Royston which arrived some days ago. "She ain't got no bus'ness gittin' letters from Yankee Aberlish-unists, nohow," was the salve the post-mistress had applied to her conscience. Indeed, she finally succeeded in persuading herself that she had done a virtuous act. And so only a heap of ashes remained of what would have been to Christie a priceless treasure. "I am going away," she thought, "and he won't know where I am. When will I ever hear from him?"

"Hello, Chris! ye're about ter run away fum us, air ye? I wur powerful afeard 'at ye'd git off afore I could git here ter tell ye good-by. I wur in hopes 'at Tobe Hawkins'u'd persuade ye ter stay weth us all

the time. Tobe, he's awful low down in the mouth sence ye kicked him—leas' ways sence the Don, he done it fur ye."

"Why, how did you hear of that, Mr. Banks? It's well I can't get at Jack. He's the traitor, I know."

"Oh well, I'll tell ye long es ye're a-goin' away an' won't tell nobody, 'at I'm powerful glad hit happened. Tobe, he needed takin' down awful bad an' ye done hit fur him an' hit's done him a sight o' good too. Well, Lizzy, she sont ye some pea-seed. Hit's them little lady-peas, ye know, 'at ye thought wus ser monst'ous fine that day ye tuk dinner weth us. An' I fetched along some o' them watermilions ye liked ser well. Tell yer grannie she hain't never seed no sech watermilions es them seed'll make, an' whut's mo' she ain't a-goin' ter see 'em in no sech lan' es ye've got in Ferginny. An' them gourd-seed. Be shore ter take good keer o' them. They'll make the fines' gourds ye ever seen. Ye won't ha'ter bile 'em nor nothin'. They'll be thes es sweet es new butter when ye fust cuts inter 'em. But them seeds ain't all I've fetched ye ter 'member us by, Chris. Come out thar, Bilbo!" and to her infinite wonder, amusement and dismay, he produced a young bear with a long chain attached to his neck. "I thought ye'd like ter show him ter yer folks in Ferginny es a ginooine Texas cur'oserty," he continued, his face beaming with the pleasure of a generous act. "The childern hated ter give him up powerful, but at las' they said bein' es hit wur you they wouldn' make no funder bejeckshuns. Step out thar, Bilbo, an' show yer Mistis whut ye kin do."

"But, Mr. Banks, really, while I am as much obliged as possible, I'm afraid I can't accept your gift.

You see, we must go many miles in a stage-coach, and my fellow-passengers might not like such a traveling companion."

"Well, I 'lowed maybe ye could hitch him on ber-hin' hit, an' take him that-a-way. He's a trav'ler, I kin tell ye."

"No, take him back to Peter. I know it almost broke his heart to send him away. I'm afraid it's not possible for me to carry him."

"Well, Peter, he wur a-whimperin' powerful when I lef' him, that's a fac', an' he'll be mighty glad ter know 'at he's got Bilbo back, an' saved his credit, too."

"Grandmamma will be very grateful for the seed, and I'll remember to tell her to plant them just as you instructed me the other day."

When she had shaken hands with him and they drove away, her father's face wore an amused smile, and Champney gave vent to his feelings in a prolonged fit of laughter when he was sure they were out of hearing.

"You sha'n't laugh at my friends," pouted Christie. "That's one of the kindest men I ever knew, and would do anything in his power to give me pleasure. You don't know what a sacrifice to friendship the offer of their petted Bilbo was. I appreciate it fully."

"I'm not laughing at him, Christie. I'm only thinking how absurd it would have been to have had that bear with us on this long journey."

It was a long, wearisome journey—several days' travel by stage-coach, and even after reaching the borders of civilization there were tedious delays at the termini of the various railroads. The present system

of close connections had not then been established, there was no checking through of baggage and no palace cars, the only "sleeper" they encountered being of such primitive construction as to afford little more of comfort than the ordinary coaches. However, after many days, Christie found herself again in her native state. Her father, having business in Richmond, made a detour in that direction, leaving her and her brother to pursue their journey alone.

It was with indescribable pleasure that she watched the lights and shadows upon the far-away Blue Ridge on which Autumn had already lighted her glowing fires. Now and then the train would dash along some mountain spur from which she could look down through the golden haze of the Indian summer into a smiling valley dotted with comfortable-looking farm-houses, yellow fields of ripening corn, and pastures in which sleek, well-fed cattle were grazing. As they would pause at some way-side station, she would listen dreamily to the soft gurgle of a mountain stream or the trickle of a fountain whose pleasant murmur was like glad music in her ears. Sometimes the cars would plunge headlong, seemingly, into the very bowels of the earth, through Tartarean darkness, again to emerge into the light of day with another landscape before them, fair as an Eastern beauty, basking in the mellow October sunshine. And so, on and on they went, with picture succeeding picture, and each so lovely that her heart ached with its excess of admiration and joy. It was as though nature had assumed her gayest aspect to welcome the wanderers home.

"I never want to leave dear old Virginia again," she said to Champney, in the ecstasy of her delight.

He smiled. "I must confess to a similar feeling,

however childish it may be. I suppose we Virginians are slow—they say so in Texas—but we have many solid comforts of which they cannot boast.”

She laughed. “How like a man! You are thinking only of our material advantages—I of all this beauty outspread before us. Just look around you, Champ.”

“Yes, it is, indeed, very beautiful.”

“It’s perfect.” She sighed, softly. “I don’t like to think it’s only the perfection—the ripeness, as it were—that precedes decay. Why will this thought so persistently obtrude itself upon me, Champ? Why is a thread of sadness inextricably interwoven with even the purest of our earthly pleasures? I can never look upon a scene like this, hear an exquisite strain of music, read a noble poem, or see a beautiful picture, or work of art in marble, without this same vague underlying sense of pain, or something very closely akin to it. Even an exceptionally fine day sometimes makes me sad, and in my love for you and the rest, I am often haunted by the fear that I must lose you. I think I am not morbid. I have striven not to be so; why is it?”

“Your’s is not a rare experience, dear. It comes, I fancy, to all who have such a keen appreciation of the truly beautiful. Dr. Lyttle, I suppose, would tell you it was only a reminder of the transitoriness of all earthly things—of the necessity for placing your affections upon something higher, and of a more permanent character.”

“Yes, yes, but the world is so beautiful, and I am content to live in it, notwithstanding these little drawbacks.”

They were now nearing the station, from which

their home was distant only a few miles, and she began to watch eagerly for familiar faces. "There they are, Champ," she suddenly cried—"Carroll and Connie. Ah, I knew she would come."

It was now Champney's turn to grow excited. A flush of pleasure overspread his face at this announcement, and he went out on the platform, ready to spring off the moment the cars stopped. It was a very quiet meeting between him and his fiancée, however—only a clasp of the hand and a glance into the eyes of the other, but that was enough to fill both hearts with happiness. Christie, giving a hand to each of her friends, received a cordial welcome. Her glowing face gave sufficient evidence of her own pleasure in the meeting.

"How well you look, Connie. I'm so glad to see you, Carroll. It's so good to be at home again. Oh, there's Uncle Daniel. How do you do, Uncle Daniel? and how are Mammy Judy and all the tribe of Dan?"—this to her grandmother's gray-haired coachman, who stood, hat in hand, smiling and bowing with a courtly grace that would have become a be-powdered, ruffled gallant of a century ago. Another moment, and her delicate hand lay in his horny palm.

"Jest toler'ble, thankee, Miss Christie—on'y jest toler'ble. Me an' Judy's a-gittin' ole now, an' cu' 'spects nothin' better'n ter be racked with all sorts o' mis'ries, an' aches, an' pains. Es fur the childern, they's all mid'lin', thankee, miss. I tell 'em ther ain't never nothin' the matter with 'em but laziness. Like all the young folks these days, they's sorter triflin'. I dunno' how come it—'twa'n't so when I was a-growin' up. They don't take it atter me, shore, an' Judy, she's es smart a woman es you'll fin' in all the country. I

r'aly dunno how come it," and he sighed and shook his head over the woful degeneracy of his race. "But 'tain' wuth while ter ax yer how yer is, Miss Christie," he continued, brightening up. "Yer looks jest es peart es a crickit."

"Howdy, Miss Chistie?" said another voice at her side.

"Why, Ezra, how are you?" she said to the grinning negro boy who stood there.

"You, Ez, how dar' yer ter leave them hosses, sah?" said Uncle Daniel, severely. "I never see nobody ser insuranceified in my life, a-comin' up yere amongs' the gen'lemen an' ladies like es ef yer wus one yerse'f. Go right back this minit ter whar yer b'longs, sah."

Ezra obeyed, muttering to himself, however, that "Unc. Dan'l'd better be er-ten'in' ter his own hosses 'stid o' scol'in' him, an' right berfo' Miss Christie, too."

"Yer see," said Uncle Daniel, apologetically, "Mars. Ca'ull, he fetched him along ter ten' ter Lady-bug an' the Black Prince while he wus a-waitin' fur the kyars ter come, an' Ez, he wus in sich a hurry ter see yer, he could'n stay out thar like a decint puss'n oughter, but mus' up an' put hisse'f for'ard like he done jest now."

But Christie gave little heed to his lengthy apology. She had heard only the first part of it. "Oh, is the Prince here? How I wish I had my saddle that I might ride him home."

"I am happy to be able to gratify your wish," said Carroll Massey, coming forward. "I brought him purposely that you might have that pleasure. There is Ezra bringing him round now. I borrowed Ger-

trude's saddle and a riding-skirt, as I knew, of course, that you couldn't get at your habit."

"How kind and thoughtful you are, Carroll. You always know just what will please me best."

She ran down to where the Black Prince stood, threw one arm over his neck and began to stroke his face. "I'd like to kiss that white star on your forehead, old fellow, only I'm afraid so much sentiment would be lost on you. See, he knows me, Carroll," she cried delightedly, as Prince instituted a search for her pocket, "and I have no sugar. It's too bad."

"Here is some. I remembered how you had always spoiled him and didn't like him to be disappointed to day."

"Thank you. I think you never forget anything."

"Little that is connected with you, Christie," he answered, in a low tone.

She made no reply to this, seeming, indeed, not to hear him as she eagerly watched the Prince devour the sugar.

"I had a two-fold motive in coming for you," he said, when, having mounted their horses they allowed the carriage, in which Constance Wingfield and Champney were seated, to pass them, and then rode slowly after it. "One was the pleasure I hoped the ride would give you and was sure it would bring to myself, and the other that Champ and Connie might have this first hour to themselves."

"Yes, I would have felt myself rather *de trop*—would have been worried by the consciousness that they were wishing me in Africa," she laughingly answered. "I am glad you have saved me the annoy-

ance. You always smooth out the rough places for me, Carroll."

"My motive was not an entirely unselfish one, this time. I wanted *you* all to *myself*, Christie."

"Just do look at Ezra, will you?" she said, laughing gaily. "If Champ had an idea of his espionage, what do you suppose he would say?"

Ezra was now occupying a footman's position on the carriage, and had taken advantage of it to keep his eyes glued to the little window of the back curtain.

"Ezra is taking notes," said Carroll, "so that he may know just how to conduct his own love-affairs. He's as imitative as a monkey."

"If Uncle Daniel were only to catch him at it, he would be made to repent his curiosity, I fancy."

"Yes, but he won't see him. He wouldn't look back for the world, lest his passengers might suspect him of playing the spy."

"I declare it's too bad. But that I would bring Ezra into disgrace with Uncle Daniel—Champ would only laugh—I'd go and tell them."

"He'll learn nothing that he doesn't already know. It's an open secret with the negroes that Mars. Champ and Miss Connie are soon to be married, and they, no doubt, are already feasting in imagination, upon the good things sure to be provided for the occasion."

"How good it was of Connie to stay with Grand-mamma while I was away."

"Yes, and the result justifies the wisdom of her decision. Aunt Lucy has grown very fond of her—indeed, the attachment is mutual."

"I shall be getting jealous."

"Small need for that. Who could take your place, Christie?"

"Oh, how lovely it all is," she said, looking about her with shining eyes. "Carroll, I know now how the Israelites must have felt when they came into the promised land after their forty years' wandering in the wilderness. No wonder some of the tribes were content to remain on the other side of Jordan. They thought there could be nothing fairer in all the world than that beautiful border-land which seemed to them an Eden after the desert wastes in which they had so long toiled. You don't know how I have hungered and thirsted for my mountains and their clear rushing streams. Just to breathe the very air brings a sense of intoxication."

"Did you dislike Texas so much?"

"No, oh no, but it's so different. I seemed unable to breathe freely, we were so shut in by woods in which the undergrowth is more dense than you can imagine."

"Why, I thought they had vast, limitless prairies."

"So they do in western Texas, but I didn't see them. My father and Champ did and liked that portion of the State much better than where Uncle Lewis lives. He is 'in the timber,' as they say out there."

"So you have no desire to live there permanently?"

"No."

"I didn't know but some one of those savages might have induced you to remain as the light of his wigwam."

"I will never marry a Texan."

"You come back heart-whole, then, Christie?"

The words were spoken lightly, but she felt his searching gaze upon her and flushed guiltily. "I had small opportunity to do otherwise," she answered. "Come," she said gaily, "here is a nice bit of road for a canter. I'll wager you a glass of grandmamma's best gooseberry wine that I reach the turning at the end of the lane first."

The Black Prince well knew what was now required of him as they set off at full speed, and bore himself bravely in the contest, coming out a full length ahead of his competitor.

"You haven't forgotten how to ride, I see," said Carroll, when they were again traveling at a more sober pace.

"No, it was almost the only recreation I had. I rode daily when the weather would permit."

"You had pleasant companions, I hope."

"Yes, my cousins were very kind and sometimes my uncle himself honored me with his attendance as my squire."

"So you had to content yourself with your uncle and cousins? Rather dull for you, I should say."

"Not at all; besides I had a slight spice of variety in the society of Mr. Bradford, the Principal of the Academy at Cairo, the little village near which my uncle lived."

"Ah, yes, I remember you occasionally mentioned him in your letters. But I don't see that he was a very great acquisition, after all. He was some blue-spectacled old greybeard, of course, inflicting moral and mental philosophy upon you by the hour and never suspecting how he was taxing your patience thereby. That's always the way with these short-sighted old Professors. It's only the fear of growing

to be like them that prevents my becoming a dominie myself."

"That reminds me, Carroll—have you yet decided what profession you will choose?"

"No, I am as far from it as ever. I detest medicine and the law, and am not fit for the church. I have about concluded that it's my duty to remain quietly at home and look after the plantation, at least until Allan is old enough to take my place."

"But your mother managed it beautifully while you were away."

"True, but she's growing old now, and needs rest."

"She will never rest, Carroll, while there remains anything to be done."

"I believe you are right. I never knew such inexhaustible energy."

"She and the girls can get on quite well without you—that has been proven—and it does seem to me that you should make some use of all the advantages you have had—that you shouldn't waste your talents in an obscure country neighborhood like this."

"There is something else you haven't forgotten," he said, smiling upon her. How handsome he was when he smiled! "You always did like to preach. I suppose you've been taking lessons under your Professor. By-the-way, was he a married man?"

"No."

"How old is he?"

"Really, I don't know—about your age, I should think."

"The mischief, you say!"

"No, I didn't say it, but never mind now about

my Professor, as you call him. We were speaking of your future, I believe."

"Yes, but there is little in it, I fear, to interest you,"—this with a slight sigh.

"But I am deeply interested—you know I am. And so you have let this year slip by in utter idleness?"

"Not so bad as that, Christie; I have kept up my classical studies, amused myself occasionally with mathematics, and dabbled a little in literature."

"Well, there, now, if only you could be induced to go to work in earnest, you might distinguish yourself. You have it in you, I do believe."

"I have done some work, though you may not be inclined to dignify it by such a name. I have contributed several articles to *De Bow's Review*. I had hoped that you might have seen them, but I suppose you had nothing to read out there in those Texan wilds."

"On the contrary, my uncle has a good library and a liberal supply of magazines, including some foreign ones. Then there was *The Living Age*, which, as you know, is a *pot pourri* of all the best periodicals of the day. As for *De Bow*, Uncle Lewis is so strong a Southerner that I verily believe he would consider himself an arch-traitor if it didn't find its way monthly to his table. I am sure I know the articles to which you allude. Indeed, I suspected their authorship when I read them. I congratulate you warmly. Both my uncle and Mr. Bradford commended them highly."

"I am obliged to Mr. Bradford," removing his hat and bowing low over his horse's neck, as he acknowledged the compliment.

They were now nearing Malvern, the home of the

Boystons for several generations past. It was an ancient, red-brick building, with green blinds and a double-storied portico in front. It stood upon an eminence that commanded an extensive view of the surrounding country. The Catawba, a limpid stream, whose silvery sheen almost dazzled their eyes as they approached, wound about the base of the hill. A wide sweep of lawn with a carpet of velvety grass, inclosed by a white-washed plank fence extended almost to its borders, but the house itself was in the midst of a clump of venerable oaks, whose spreading branches made a cosey shelter for the rustic seats standing beneath. Immediately in front was an open circle, in which a fountain played, its waters springing out of a grassy mound, a mass of glittering crystals in the waning sunlight, its lovely, kaleidoscopic tints transforming it into the semblance of a dome of richest stained glass. Tears of gladness stole into Christie's eyes as all these familiar objects came into view. She looked beyond to the misty Blue Ridge, over which the purple shades of evening were falling. Beneath, however, the mountains peeped out, like the face of a blushing bride, to receive the last kiss of the setting sun. A bank of clouds, gorgeous in hue, was piled up behind them, casting a reflected glow upon them and all the intervening valley. This valley, a long stretch of hill and dale, cultivated fields and woodland, lay spread out before her. Her eyes wandered eagerly, hungrily, over the scene, until they finally rested, with a look of supreme content, upon the old house in which she had been born. Flocks of pigeons, her grandmother's especial pets, were circling about it preparatory to retiring for the night.

"Oh, Carroll, did you ever see anything more

peaceful, more lovely than it all is?" she said, drawing a long breath. "And look! there's dear grand-mamma standing in the front portico—and Mammy Judy's just behind her. Come, let's go faster."

Mrs. Royston was dressed as usual—Christie would scarcely have known her otherwise—in black silk, with dainty lace ruffles at the throat and wrists, a cameo pin securing the former, and a cap of the same gossamer material falling softly over the braids of snowy hair. Mammy Judy had donned her best dress for the occasion—a cast-off silk of her mistress—its monotony, for it was almost the color of her face, relieved by a towering white turban, a white kerchief about her shoulders, and a snowy apron fastened around her waist.

Mrs. Royston stood quietly awaiting her granddaughter's approach, but her sable attendant began a series of smiling curtsies before her young mistress was well off her horse. These she continued until Christie was released from her grandmother's embrace. Then, considering that her turn had come at last, she caught her to her own ample bosom, and imprinted kiss after kiss upon the sweet face. "Thank the good Lord fur bringin' my chile home ag'in," she exclaimed, when she had finally let her go. "I'm a ole fool fur cryin', honey," vigorously applying the corner of her apron to her eyes, "but I thought yer wa'n't never a-goin' ter come back no mo'. I made shore them wil' varmints'u'd eat yer up, ur 'at them Injuns'u'd git yer. Thanks be ter God! He's heerd my pra'ers."

"Won't you come in and take tea with us, Carroll?" said Mrs. Royston, never forgetful of others even under the most exciting circumstances.

"Thank you, no, Aunt Lucy, not to-night. I pre-

fer to come when I will be of more importance than is likely to be the case now. Connie and I must be content to retire into the background for the present, but you mustn't give up your old favorites entirely. I couldn't bear that."

She smiled upon him in her gentle, sweet way. He was a favorite with her, and he knew it. Bidding them good-evening, he rode slowly away. They had arrived before the carriage, after all, as they had taken a shorter way through the fields. Possibly, too, Uncle Daniel may have had a purpose in driving so deliberately. The old gentleman had not forgotten the days when he went a-courting his Judy, and he was determined that "Mars. Champ" should have "a fa'r chance ter talk ter Miss Connie while he had her ter hisse'f." As for Ezra, he would not have cared had the ride lasted some hours longer, or at least until time for supper. He did not remember ever in his life to have enjoyed one more. "Golly!" he said once, rolling up his eyes in the ecstasy of his bliss, "wa'n't dat er sockdolerger? Dat's de dinctum, sho'!"

What may have been the meaning of this mysterious exclamation we shall probably never know. Ezra, to his credit be it spoken, never revealed anything he saw or heard on that drive. "Mars. Champ mought gi' er feller's head er crackin'," he sagely observed. The ponderous family coach now came in sight, and Christie noticed that her grandmother began to tremble as she watched its slow advance. She quietly put her arm about her waist and continued her cheerful chatter in seeming unconsciousness of this fact. She had always known that, however dear she might be to Mrs. Royston, Champney was the very light of her eyes. But she had never been jealous, contenting

herself with the warm love she knew to be hers, and striving by every means in her power to return to her protectress some tithe of the care bestowed upon her own motherless childhood.

"He's almost as brown as a Mexican, Grandmamma,—you'll scarcely know him. But he looks so well and strong."

"And happy," murmured Mrs. Royston, as she caught sight of his beaming face. "Yes, thank God, my boy has a happy future before him."

They came up the graveled walk—those two young creatures—side by side and looking very content that it should be so. The world was all before them, they belonged to each other, friends looked on in smiling approbation, even fortune herself favored them—what more could they ask of fate?

"I must go, Christie," and ere she was aware, her grandmother had slipped out of her embrace and was running down the steps to meet them.

"What, Grandmamma, out on the damp walk and wearing those thin slippers! This will never do," and having first kissed her warmly, Champney caught her up and carried her into the house as if she had been a child. He sat down on the bench in the portico and held her in his arms while she had her cry out on his shoulder.

"Why, Grandmamma, I never knew you to do so undignified a thing," said Christie, gaily. "You'll spoil Champ completely by allowing him to see how much you think of him. And here's Mammy Judy feeling dreadfully aggrieved because Mars. Champ has taken no notice of her."

She sat up now, wiped her eyes, smiled and rose, leaving him at liberty to shake hands with mammy.

"I was very foolish," she said. "I believe I'll go to my room for a moment, Judy," she faltered, as the tears threatened to come again.

The faithful servant followed her mistress, and the young people dispersed to their rooms to prepare for tea. Constance occupied one communicating with that of Christie so that they could be practically thrown into one.

"How pretty you've made it!" said Christie looking admiringly about her. At the windows hung snowy curtains of dimity edged with pretty ball fringe and looped back with blue ribbons. Upon the bed was a counterpane of the same material, and the pillows were arrayed in shams of lace over a blue foundation. The dressing-table and mirror were gracefully draped with sheer white muslin, its soft folds caught up with knots of blue, and upon it as well as the mantel and tall chest of drawers were vases of flowers. There was no carpet upon the floor, which had been stained, waxed and polished until it shone like a mirror, but a soft rug was thrown beside the bed and others before the dressing-table, wash-stand and bureau.

"I am glad you like it," said Constance. "It's rather late in the season for its summer livery, but I thought you'd prefer it as it is."

"Infinitely; it was very kind of you, but indeed, Connie, you have rolled up such a long list of debts against me in the past year that I'll never be able to repay them."

"I have done nothing that was not a pleasure to me, Christie."

"That I can readily believe. You always find your own happiness in making that of others."

"I have been selfish in it," she gaily answered. "I was so lonely, you know—I was forced in self-defense to make friends."

Constance Wingfield was an orphan, the only child of parents who had died when she was just developing into maidenhood, leaving her to the care and guardianship of a bachelor uncle. He, however fond of her he may have been—and he was as fond of her as it was in his nature to be of any one—had been so absorbed in his books as to give her little of what she would have valued most—his time and attention. Her own parents left her an independent fortune, and when to this was added that of her uncle at his death, she became quite an heiress.

This was the least of her attractions in Champney Royston's eyes, however, and she, though inclined to be somewhat suspicious of the motives of her many suitors, had done him full justice in this respect. The death of her uncle had occurred shortly before Christie's departure for Texas, and it had been arranged that the marriage should take place when the year of her mourning should have expired. Meantime she was induced to take up her abode with Mrs. Royston for the present, as she had no near relatives of her own save an uncle in New York City whom she had not seen for many years.

It had been with some reluctance that Champney's grandmother had consented to this arrangement. Although she would not have admitted it even to herself, she was inclined to be a bit jealous of the girl who had won the chief right to her boy's affections. It was not long, however, until Constance had stolen her way into the elder lady's heart, making for herself a place

that would be kept warm and bright for her while life should last.

The two girls now went down to tea—and such a tea! The table, of such size as is now not often seen, was of mahogany, grown richly-dark with age and the patient polishing of several generations of servants. Its beauty was not concealed by a cloth, but under each dish was a brightly-bordered napkin with fringed ends. Then there was such an array of cut-glass and silver! Mammy Juddy, who filled the important post of housekeeper, had unearthed all of which the family could boast in honor of the “children’s” arrival. A brazen chandelier with shining, pendant crystals and holding a number of wax candles hung over the centre of the table, prettily lighting up the whole.

They all stood with their hands reverently folded upon the backs of their chairs, while Mrs. Royston invoked a blessing upon the meal, and then sat down to enjoy it. It was worthy of its setting. Christie praised each dish with so much effusion that her grandmother, smiling at her from behind the great silver tea-urn, said, “Why, Christie, one would think your Aunt Virginia had entirely lost her housekeeping skill since her removal to Texas. She had quite a reputation in that way when she was here.”

“And she deserves it still, but—I don’t know why it was—I didn’t seem to have the power to enjoy the good things she used to give us, as I do at home. For one thing, we had no ice. Look at that bowl of boonyclabber. How smooth and rich and firm is the cream upon it! and I know you’ll give it to me as cold as ice can make it. It was a standing grievance with poor Aunt Virginia that, with all her care, she couldn’t prevent little watery bubbles from some-

times appearing upon the surface, and then, to keep it cool, the water in which it stood must be constantly changed. Aunt Dilsie, who, you remember, is the cook, often complained that there 'wa'n't nothin' fit-ten ter eat in 'Texis,' and would wonder 'whut ole Miss'd say ter sich doin's es dese.' The negroes generally spoke in contemptuous terms of Texas as compared with Virginia, and yet, strange to say, none of them desired to return here. Uncle Lewis explained it by saying that the soil is so light and easy of cultivation—it's a sandy loam—that their labors are much less heavy; and then, they are like salamanders, you know,—can't have too much heat."

The evening passed in delightful converse, but out of consideration for the travelers, prayers were held in the library at an early hour, Mrs. Royston herself officiating—a duty she never delegated to any one else. At these services the house-servants were always required to be present.

Almost immediately afterwards, Christie, bidding her friends good-night, retired to her room. This she did, not so much from fatigue, although she was very tired, as from a desire to be alone. Her mind was in such a whirl that only solitude could reduce it to order. Weary as she was, she could not sleep for some hours, so many re-awakened thoughts and memories came thronging upon her.

During her absence in Texas she had almost forgotten Carroll Massey's life-long devotion to her, or, at any rate, had allowed herself to drift into the belief that he entertained for her only a brotherly affection, Now it was with a shock that she found herself undeceived. She could not mistake the looks he had bent upon her or the covert meaning of his words in their

ride that afternoon. She could not remember the time when he had not been her boy-lover—her champion in all the disputes that arose among the children of the two families in their plays together. Cloverdale, his mother's place, adjoined that of Mrs. Royston, and a distant relationship and long-existing friendship had drawn their owners as well as the younger generation very nearly to each other. To the young Masseys, Mrs. Royston was "Aunt Lucy," and in like manner Champney and Christie called Mrs. Massey "Aunt Ella," although she was in reality only their cousin several times removed.

Christie had known that her grandmother fully approved of the growing affection between herself and Carroll. She had also reason to believe that her father regarded with favor the probability of the existence of a closer tie between them in the future. Before her visit to Texas, she, herself, had learned to look upon the possibility of becoming his wife with equanimity—almost with pleasure—but she did not often think seriously about it. It seemed to her something in the far-away future, about which she need not, at present, concern herself.

That Carroll had not, long ago, spoken to her definitely upon the subject was due to Champney. He, reading his young sister's heart more truly aright than his elders, had exacted from him a promise to wait until she should be old enough to know her own mind better—until she had been thrown more into the society of other young men besides himself. It was not until she had met Felix Bradford that she had thought of swerving from her allegiance to her early friend. Indeed, she did not then think of it—it came upon her unawares. In thinking of them now, she

wondered that it should have been so. Carroll was certainly handsomer, and had more engaging manners. Moreover, Christie was not one to underrate the value of this latter accomplishment. She had been brought up in such a school of courtesy as probably, at that time, could nowhere be excelled in the United States.

It has been said that "manners are the shadows of virtue." In the Virginians of that period, this courtly politeness shadowed forth an inexhaustible hospitality—nay, a genuine love of their kind rarely equaled in this more material age. Contrasting now Carroll Massey's suave affability with Felix Bradford's almost rugged sincerity, Christie began to search for the charm that had once so drawn her to him. Not that Carroll was insincere—he only strove more to please.

Pondering these things, she at last came to the conclusion that it was the superior earnestness—the fixedness of purpose in the New Englander that had led her to feel her faith in him founded as upon a rock. How restful his presence had always been ! With Carroll it was otherwise. She knew him to be honorable and upright to the last degree, and yet—and yet, there was a vague, intangible something lacking—a want which made itself always felt. His talents were more brilliant than those of Felix Bradford, but he had not made as much of them. One had been brought up amid wealth and luxury, with a slave at hand to attend to every want ; the other had known only poverty—not of that abject nature that so grinds the soul of man, but his father had always been in straitened circumstances, and the son had, from necessity, early to put forth his best energies to assist him in his life-struggle. The expenses of his education—at least during those years at the University of Virginia—had

been paid by himself—with money that had been the result of his own labor. He had learned to know the virtues of economy—that three-fourths of men's so-called wants were imaginary; and after the first struggle, it had been easy to put them aside as superfluous. When teaching at Cairo, it had been no part of his design to remain longer in that position than compelled by circumstances. All his leisure time, except the hours of recreation he allowed himself in his intercourse with the Roystons and one or two other families, had been devoted to the study of the law. He was looking steadily forward to the time—not so far away at the opening of our story, when he should be granted the license to practice his profession. It was this brave struggle with adverse fate that had first elicited Christie's admiration and respect, and the feeling had, unconsciously to herself, gradually grown into a warmer one.

She saw now clearly wherein lay the difference between the two young men. In Carroll Massey the energies were still lying dormant; in Felix Bradford they had been forced into early bloom—prematurely, she was almost inclined to think, as she remembered the grave, earnest face. "But," she reflected, "surely life cannot be given us simply for our own pleasure. Mr. Bradford has chosen the better part."

It was with a dull ache at her heart that she thought of her two friends. Carroll was very dear to her, and it grieved her that she could not give him that perfect love he craved. On the other hand, she began to doubt whether Felix Bradford had cared for her as she had supposed. If so, would he not have found some means to assure her of his safety? He must know her anxiety. And then a cold hand seemed

to grasp her heart as she thought of the possibility that she had enabled him to escape danger only to fall into others equally grave. She could only send up a silent petition to the All-Father to watch over and care for him.

Somewhat calmed by this, but still vexed and sore in spirit, she at length fell asleep listening vaguely to the drowsy, monotonous tinkle of the fountain mingling with the distant murmur of the swiftly-flowing Catawba.

When she awaked, she sprang out of bed at once, alarmed lest she might be too late for breakfast. Grandmamma was very exacting in this particular. Consulting her watch, however, she found she was in ample time. Hearing certain familiar sounds proceeding from the poultry-yard, she glanced out of a window, readily guessing at the picture that would greet her eyes. Yes, there stood grandmamma, covered from her throat to her dainty feet with a long-sleeved blue and white checked cotton apron, feeding her feathered pets from a tin basin she held in her hand. They were crowding about her, the pigeons fluttering around her head, and one had perched himself upon her shoulder while another had boldly taken his stand on the basin itself and was deliberately helping himself to his breakfast.

A light hoar frost had fallen, and the sun, just peeping over the tops of the distant mountains, sent down long, slanting beams into the valley below, when, as by magic, it became strewn with diamonds flashing like stars in the quivering rays. The Catawba, too, leaped and sparkled and rippled in the joyousness of its delight in the re-awakened day. There was a crisp freshness in the air that set every vein to tingling.

Seeing this peaceful, happy scene, and feeling to the inmost core of her heart how good it was to be at home again, the shadows that had floated about Christie the night before took to themselves wings with the darkness whose children they were. It was with almost her old-time careless happiness that she dressed herself, singing merry snatches of song the while, and descended to the library for the morning prayers.

CHAPTER VIII.

DOUBTS AND PERPLEXITIES.

SEVERAL months have passed since Christie's return home. Within a few weeks after her arrival her anxiety concerning Felix Bradford had been set at rest, but she had now come to the conclusion that he had never cared for her except as the sister of his friend. First came a letter from Jack, in which he said, "I suppose you know Mr. Bradford is all right—safe at his home in Yankee-land." Jack was now installed as a boarder in Judge Roy's household, attending the school in Santa Rita.

"It goes pretty hard with a fellow," he wrote, "to be geared up in stiff collar and cravat all the time—how I miss you about tying it for me, Christie—but little Miss Violet looks daggers at me whenever I make my appearance without them. I don't seem to be making much headway with her. I wrote some poetry and slipped it under her door the other day, and she laughed at it right to my face although she must have known I put it there. Never mind! I'll make her laugh the other side of her mouth one of these days." Jack, it will be observed, could write more correctly than one would suppose from his usual style of speech.

Following closely upon his epistle, came one from Felix Bradford himself to Champney Royston. "I

am writing at a venture," he said, "not knowing whether you have yet returned from Mexico." He asked, "to be kindly remembered to Miss Royston, who, I suppose, is now at home with you."

To this Champney replied at once, and then came another enclosing a check for the amount of money Christie had forced upon him the night of his departure from Cairo. "Please again thank her for me," he wrote, "though I feel what a poor return mere thanks are for what she did for me. If to be held in remembrance as one of the noblest of women can in the slightest degree compensate her for her sacrifice of her strongest prejudices in my favor, then she may rest assured that she will be so held by me."

With such dry husks was Christie forced to feed her hungering soul. A shadow had crept into her bright face which was never wholly lifted—which Mrs. Royston attributed to the shock she had received during those last days of her stay in Texas. She had, in due time, been informed of the part Christie had played in those exciting scenes.

As her granddaughter had foreseen, some diplomacy was necessary to bring her to regard it with unprejudiced eyes. "And all for a Yankee school-master, Christie!" she had said with uplifted hands, forgetting for the moment that he was Champney's friend as well. Grandmanma had an inveterate dislike of "Yankees"—the one blot upon an otherwise lovely character. Gradually, however, the combined influence of Mr. Royston, Champney, and Constance Wingfield induced her to forgive what she must always secretly deplore as a *faux pas*. Meantime, more than one letter from Felix Bradford had found its way into Mrs. Gurney's hands to share the fate of the first.

"My Dear Christie," began the last, "Dare I call you so? If I have presumed too much, pray forgive me. It is thus I think of you always, and the words slipped from my pen almost unawares. I have strange news to tell you. As I have already written you, I was detained for some weeks in Missouri by a malarial attack—the result of my residence in Texas. On my recovery, the state of my health determined me to come home at once instead of seeking another field of labor as I had intended to do. Here I was met by the tidings that my uncle in the West had died, leaving the bulk of his fortune to me. That it is pleasant to know this I will not deny, for now I can feel at liberty to tell you what I have often longed to do but was forced to restrain myself while I was only a poor teacher struggling to make for himself a place among his fellow-men. You must know that I love you, Christie! deeply, truly,—as I can love only one woman in the world. Will you be my wife? I can ask you now that no suspicion of being a fortune-hunter can attach itself to me. I am no more worthy of you than before—I can never be that—but I feel that I can make you happy if you will trust your future in my keeping. I am glad that I am rich, that I may be able to surround you with luxuries which I could not otherwise have given you. I have sometimes thought—hoped, that you are not indifferent to me. If I am mistaken, I will not pain you by forcing a reply to this. I know your tender heart,—how you shrink from inflicting suffering upon others, and would spare you the trial in my case. I shall then consider silence on your part as a rejection of my suit. It will go hard with me to give up the thought of life passed at your side, sweetened and ennobled by your presence, but let

nothing of this trouble you. It will not be your fault. I have borne every ill that life has hitherto brought me. I can bear this also. Whatever the result, I shall never regret having loved you.

“Yours truly,

“FELIX BRADFORD.”

It was now almost mid-winter,—within a week of the Christmas holidays, and the wedding of Champney and Constance would take place in a few days. He had written to his friend, Bradford, asking him to act as “best man” on that occasion, but had received in reply his regrets that urgent business would prevent his having that pleasure. Christie had heard his decision in silence, but her keen-eyed brother had seen the disappointment in her face. He had for some time observed her uneasiness, and had guessed at the cause, but could do nothing save to express his increased love and sympathy by those thoughtful, kindly acts of consideration which go so far to make up the happiness of our lives. He, as well as the rest of his family, would have been pleased had she been content to become the wife of Carroll Massey.

In this, he may have been a bit selfish, as he knew, in that case, she would always be near them. Then, too, he had a theory that the marriage of persons belonging to the two sections of country so widely differing as to customs, opinions, etc., was always attended with some risks which he would gladly have seen his sister avoid. Still, he had a genuine affection and admiration for Felix Bradford, and would not have opposed a union between him and Christie on such intangible grounds.

“Come,” he had written to him, “and let’s be

friends while we may. Dark clouds are gathering over our country, and ere another year be passed, it may be that you and I will be pitted against each other on the battle-field. What an unnatural state of affairs that will be. But I know well your political principles—that you will be one of the first to draw your sword for the old flag. As for me, I must go with Virginia, God bless her! the home of our race for more than a hundred years.”

In reply, his friend had said, “You guessed rightly in thinking that I will cling to the old flag in case there should be hostilities between the Northern and Southern states, but I hope that such a calamity may yet be averted. I confess, there seems little probability of doing so now. All the signs of the times are ominous. Well, it will be like tearing the heart out of my bosom if ever I should be forced to go upon Virginia soil as an enemy to her people. I can never forget the kindness with which I was received during those years at the University—above all, that which you extended to me. I am under obligations to you and yours which cannot be expunged while life shall last. The truth is, Champney, my heart is half Southern, but in this matter I shall not listen to its dictates—they are not to be trusted—but only to the sterner voice of duty.”

A misty rain was falling, the tiny drops congealing as they fell. The Blue Ridge was a line of white against the leaden sky. In the valley, as far as the eye could reach, “all bloodless lay the untrodden snow,” broken only by dark-gray fence-rows or clumps of woods here and there. The voice of the fountain was no longer heard and the Catawba flowed silently under a film of ice. The fir-trees, cedars, and other

evergreens were half-hidden under their snowy veil, and pale-blue icicles clung to their chilled limbs. Even the pigeons had sought shelter in the dove-cot, and chanticleer and his companions had disappeared from the barn-yard. Christie shivered as she looked out upon the wintry scene. She dreaded the approaching festivities. She said to herself that it was only because she must so soon give up Champney, her only brother, and the thought gave her a pang even though it was to one so dearly loved as Constance. She would not admit that her disappointment as to Felix Bradford's coming had a share in causing her depressed mood. A gray pall seemed to have settled upon everything—upon the outside world and her own spirits as well.

The tears rose into her eyes and, presently, she felt one fall upon her clasped hands. Roused by this, she started suddenly and turned from the window. "This will never do," she said. "I am crying for I know not what. I must not damp Connie's and Champ's happiness by allowing them to see that I care."

A great fire roared in the wide-mouthed chimney. About the room were evergreens, arranged in all sorts of fanciful shapes, waiting to be hung upon the walls. From another, came the sound of merry young voices and laughter with which that of Uncle Daniel occasionally mingled. "The old gentleman is distinguishing himself to-day," said Christie to herself with a smile. "Such volleys of wit and wisdom I have never before heard from his lips. He keeps those young people in an incessant roar, and the work suffers in consequence. I suspect Champ gave him a dram of unusual strength this morning. How slow he is!"

and she looked rather impatiently at the heap of evergreens.

She sat down to the piano, and, partly in indignation at her own low spirits, partly in sheer desperation, dashed into a brilliant waltz. Soon, they all came trooping in and began a mad whirl about the room, Uncle Daniel standing in the door, grinning delightedly, and beating time with both hands and feet. She took no apparent notice of them at first, but at length stopped suddenly, bringing down her hands upon the keys with a crash.

"I'll have no more of this!" she said severely. "Here have I been, possessing my soul with what patience I might for the past fifteen minutes, expecting Uncle Daniel every moment to come to my assistance. Can you spare him to me now?"

"Spare him! No, indeed! we have scarcely begun our work. We shall want him for at least two hours yet."

"I expected better things of you, Uncle Daniel," looking reproachfully at the recreant servant.

"Yes'm, Miss Christie, but don' blame me pleas'm. It's the fault o' these young folks, Miss Christie, 'deed it is, Miss. They don' let a man have no peace o' his min'—that they don't. It's uncle Dan'l this, an' uncle Dan'l that, an' uncle Dan'l yere, an, uncle Dan'l thar, an' then I mus' up an make speeches fur em' an' tell em' all about whut I said ter Judy when I wus a-courtin' uv her, an' sing' em love-songs, an' tell 'em riddles, an' whut with it all, Miss, the ole man, he don' know whuther he on his head ur his heels. That's jes' the Lord's trufe, Miss."

"But you followed them in here when you might have remained at your work."

"Yes'm," scratching his head perplexedly, "but you wus the one ter blame thar. That music o' yourn wus ernough ter fetch a man off'n his dyin' bed—'deed, it wus, Miss. It mos' make me want ter pat Juba."

"Where's grandmamma, that she doesn't keep order among you?" asked Christie, laughing.

"Oh she's with Mammy Judy in the pantry and isn't thinking of us," answered a chorus of gay voices.

"Well, let every one return at once to his work, and Uncle Daniel, mind, no more speechifying until nothing remains to be done. Here, Carroll! Carroll Massey, you stay here and hang these evergreens. It seems I'm not to have Uncle Daniel, and Champ's no good whatever to me now. He lives in the moon now-a-days. Come, out with you—every one but Carroll."

The room was soon cleared, the girls laughing and pirouetting as they went and their male companions scarcely more dignified in their movements. Uncle Daniel, displaying every tooth in his head—not many, by-the-way, for he was in the forlorn condition of poor uncle Ned—shuffled heavily after them.

"Now, Carroll," said Christie, soberly, "I mean what I say. This work must be done, and you must do it."

"You have only to lay your commands upon me."

"First, then, bring the step-ladder."

He made a wry face, but quietly did her bidding. They were soon hard at work, and managed to accomplish a great deal in a remarkably short space of time.

"Now I'll grant you a few minutes' intermission of labor," she said, gaily, when she saw that he was really fatigued; "and I want you to tell me—my curi-

osity has been ever so much excited—what you and grandmamma were discussing so earnestly this morning.”

He looked searchingly at her. “Shall I tell you, Christie?” he asked. Something in his face warned her that she was treading upon dangerous ground. “Yes—no,” she said, confusedly, “you needn’t. I believe I’ve changed my mind.”

“But I would like to tell you, and am only too glad that you have given me the opportunity. I was saying to her how much I would like to make this a double wedding, and she joined me in wishing that it might be so.”

“Then why don’t you? What’s to hinder?”

She spoke constrainedly in spite of her efforts to seem unconscious. “What reason can I have but that the bride has not yet consented? It takes two to carry out a contract of that sort, you know. Oh, Christie, why may it not be? You know how long and faithfully I have loved you,” and he caught up her hand and pressed it eagerly.

Christie felt her brain whirling. “Why not?” she asked herself. Her grandmother, her father, Champ—all wished it, and had she the right to disappoint them? But then she did not love Carroll as he would wish his wife to do—might never do so. No, she would not do him and herself such gross injustice. She was about gently to withdraw her hand and explain her hesitation when she glanced up and there, standing in the doorway just opposite them, and looking down upon them with a white, set face, was Felix Bradford. Was it he or only his wraith? How came he there? She had not heard him enter; why had not the servant announced him? She passed her hand over her

forehead and made an inarticulate effort to speak. He, seeing and pitying her confusion, now came forward with outstretched hand. Carroll, meanwhile, had been looking perplexedly from one to the other.

"I beg your pardon for intruding upon you in this way," said the new arrival, "but I suppose Champney must have failed to get my letter informing him of my change of plan. I found that I was not expected at the railway station, but succeeded in getting a conveyance for myself and luggage. The servant directed me to this room, saying that you were all here."

She had now regained her composure. "The house is in such a state of confusion just now, Mr. Bradford, that I can see how the mistake occurred. Micah is not on duty to-day, his services being required elsewhere, and the girl evidently didn't understand her instructions. This is my friend, Carroll Massey, of whom you have often heard me speak. Carroll, Mr. Bradford, my brother's class-mate and friend, and, I trust, also my own. Pray be seated, Mr. Bradford, and I will go at once for Champney."

How glad she was to escape from the room! Yet her heart was like lead in her bosom as she went in search of her brother.

"What's the matter, Christie?" he asked, a little excitedly, when he saw her. "You look as though you had seen a ghost."

"I don't know but I have," she answered with a laugh in which there was no mirth. "Champ, Mr. Bradford is in the library."

"Indeed!" he exclaimed, springing up, his whole face aglow with pleasure. "I will go to him at once."

Christie went up-stairs to her own room and,

flinging herself upon the bed, buried her face in one of the pillows. She was conscious only of her utter misery and despair. "It's all over now—all—all over," she repeated again and again to herself. "Even if he still loved me, he would never speak after witnessing that scene. Oh, Carroll, Carroll!"

No tears came to her relief. By and by, she remembered that she must go down—that no one must know what she was suffering. As she descended the stairs, she saw Carroll standing in the hall eagerly watching for her. When she reached him he again caught up her hand and whispered, "Oh, Christie, I must have my answer. I can wait no longer."

She could feel his hand trembling with excitement. Her own was like marble. "Don't worry me about it now," she said pleadingly as she withdrew it. "I love you very, very dearly, Carroll, but not in the way you would like. Please try to forget all about it."

"That I cannot, Christie. But I will not lose hope. I will yet teach you to love me."

The dark eyes were bent upon her very lovingly. It was almost more than she could bear. Glancing up at this moment, she saw Felix Bradford's pale face and sad, sad eyes looking into her own from the depths of the hall mirror, which, unfortunately, stood just opposite to his seat in the drawing-room. He must have seen all that had passed, and put his own construction on it. "Say no more, Carroll," she urged, imploringly. "What may be in the future, I cannot tell, but I would wrong you greatly to marry you now," and she passed hurriedly on into the dining-room to assist her grandmother in the extra duties entailed upon her by such an unusual influx of visitors.

She went about her tasks as one in a painful dream.

One thought, however, was supreme with her—that she must control herself so that no suspicion of her disquietude should be awakened. Such a merry, happy group as they were ! and she smiled and jested with them just as though nothing had occurred to cast a shadow over her own spirit. She found herself seated next to Felix Bradford at table, and they talked together in their accustomed calm, friendly way. His perfect self-possession did much to aid her in retaining her own. When they had returned to the drawing-room, she told him of what had taken place after his departure from Cairo.

“Jack wrote me something of it all,” he said, “though, of course, he knew nothing of the suspicions attaching to Julian Lambert. I fear he was the prime instigator of the mischief, and yet I scarcely see how a man so astute in business affairs as he has proven himself to be, could have hoped for success in such an undertaking. However, there is no evil of which he is not capable. He is, without exception, the worst man I ever knew. By-the-way,” he continued, with the shadow of a smile lurking about the corners of his mouth, “Jack gave me a laughable account of Parson Nicholls’ discomfiture, as well as the Don’s succeeding exploits. It must have been very ludicrous.”

“Yes, I think such a thing could have occurred nowhere but in Texas.”

“The manners and customs of the people there are somewhat primitive, I must confess, but I liked them nevertheless—all except Lambert.”

“And Mrs. Gurney,” added Christie. “I was positively afraid of her.”

“You were not alone in that, I fancy.”

“No,” said she, laughing, “I have heard even

strong men confess to a certain sinking of the heart whenever she cast an eye upon them. Mr. Banks told me that 'she wur the onlies' livin' thing he wur afeard ov.'"

"That Eb. Banks, now—what a character he was! Rough and uncouth as possible in manner, ready as an Indian to resent an injury, yet full of kindly impulses, and having an ample fund of strong, common-sense."

And so they talked on of their mutual past, until each was lulled into momentary forgetfulness of the painful present. That night, the young people, as usual, spent some hours in dancing—their favorite amusement, while whist-tables were prepared for their more staid elders. Uncle Daniel, with his violin, now evidently considered himself to be the most important personage in the assembly, and exercised his authority accordingly. By this time, a goodly number of friends and relatives were assembled at the old homestead, some having come in carriages more than one day's journey, encountering all sorts of difficulties with equanimity, and finding an ample recompense in the cordial welcome awaiting them. Felix Bradford asked to be excused from the dancing, and joined one of the card-parties. Cousin Priscilla, who was always *au fait* in the love-affairs of the various members of the family, was his partner. Her attention was often distracted from the game by the dancers, who were gaily tripping it, now in the mazes of the cotillion, now in the whirling waltz, and again giving themselves up to the wild jollity and fun of the Virginia reel. "Do look at Christie," she said once to her *vis-a-vis*. "I never saw her more beautiful. No wonder, when Carroll Massey is her partner. I think him the very

handsomest young man I know. How happy they will be ! It won't be long, I suppose, before we are all again assembled at Malvern for another wedding. If I were Cousin Lucy, I should have insisted on making one trouble of it. Ah, well, it's all the better for us. Why, Mr. Bradford, what do you mean ? You are actually trumping my ace."

"I beg pardon," he murmured confusedly. "I believe I was a little absent."

"I should say so. Please to keep your attention fixed upon the game while you are my partner. I am very exacting in that particular—find it difficult to forgive a blunder. As I was saying, Christie and Carroll will make the handsomest couple that ever—There ! you are doing something just as bad—throwing away your king on my queen—and with such an air of triumph too. It's too bad I declare," and so the voluble lady rattled on, never suspecting what a dagger was each word in the heart of the man who seemed so cold and impassible. "Just like all the Yankees I ever knew," she afterwards affirmed ; "nothing you can do or say can stir the blood in their veins. It gets frozen during their long cold winters and never thaws again."

And Christie laughed and danced and sang with the merriest, and when, at last, it was all over, sobbed herself to sleep like a tired child.

It is no part of my purpose to describe a Virginian wedding under the old *regime*. There are many now living who remember that of Champney Royston and Constance Wingfield in all its details, and for those who do not, better descriptions of similar events have often been given than any of which my pen is capable. With Mrs. Royston, *The Virginia House-Wife* was still of paramount authority in the kitchen, and mar-

velous were the results of hers and Mammy Judy's culinary skill. A small army of servants acting under their supervision, filled the store-room with such mounds of cake, such quantities of delicious jellies, creams, &c., as kept them in a constant state of blissful expectancy, for well they knew they would fall heir to no small share of these dainties.

Ezra, who chanced to be sent over from Cloverdale on some errand to the mistress of Malvern, found her in this treasure-chamber and was so entranced by the dazzling vision that met his eyes, that, forgetful of her august presence, he turned several somersaults before he remembered of what an enormity he was guilty. Then he stood up and humbly begged pardon. "I done cl'ar furgit whar I wus, Miss Lucy. Golly!" he continued, unable to repress his enthusiasm, "I wush Mars. Champ'u'd git married ev'ry year." He was first reprimanded for his lack of respect and then consoled with a huge piece of cake that had been condemned as a little "sad." He asked to be allowed "jes' er tas'" of an egg in one of the "birds' nests," and was rewarded with a resounding cuff on his ear from Mammy Judy for his "imperdunce." But in my sympathy with Ezra's gastronomic propensities, I am about to betray some of the secrets of the wedding after all. I can only plead in excuse that a weary wanderer in the wilderness, from long enforced abstinence, will sometimes look back rather longingly to "the flesh-pots of Egypt."

The day after the wedding the newly-married pair left for a tour to the North, but most of the guests remained for the holidays. Felix Bradford, however, also left them, pleading that business required his presence at home. He went away laboring under the

belief that Christie was the affianced bride of Carroll Massey. To remain was torturing, and yet it was almost equally so to tear himself away. But he knew what a struggle he must undergo before peace of mind could be restored to him, and nerved himself for the conflict. He and Christie chanced to be the sole occupants of the library for a few minutes before his departure. "I cannot go, Miss Royston," he said, taking her hand into his, "until I have again thanked you for what you did for me. That was an act I can never forget, and I shall endeavor to so fill my life with good deeds that neither of us will ever regret it. In all probability it will be a lonely one—with no wife or child to cheer me on my way—but I will try to make it a useful one. It will be a source of consolation to me to know that you, at least, are happy. You have a bright future awaiting you, my friend, but not more so than you deserve."

A slight sigh, instantly checked, accompanied the last words, and then with a long hungering look into the sweet down-cast face, he gently let go her hand and turned away. When he was gone she laid her head on the piano and cried softly for a few minutes. Then, running up to her room, she bathed her face and came down again ready to assume her duties as assistant hostess of Malvern. She found her guests discussing Felix Bradford.

"A right clever Yankee," pronounced cousin Priscilla, using the word "clever" in the Southern sense, "but so cold. However, that's his misfortune rather than his fault. He can't help it, being a native of Massachusetts."

"How odd it was, Christie," said Carroll Massey, "that I never thought of your Mr. Bradford and

Champney's friend being one and the same. But I had so fully made up my mind that he was some old dry-bones of a Professor that it didn't once occur to me."

"If you had known the truth, I suppose you would have been consumed with jealousy while Christie was in Texas," said one of the younger cousins, mischievously. That Carroll and Christie would eventually be married seemed to be an assumed fact with all, and jesting allusions to that event had been made more than once.

He flushed slightly. "Perhaps; at any rate, I am glad I didn't know it."

"But I thought he seemed colder to Christie than to any one else," continued the same thoughtless girl who had before spoken. "Why was that, Christie? How did you manage to offend his High Mightiness?"

She replied that she was not aware of having given offense—that they were very good friends, &c.; but there was a certain constraint in her manner, and Carroll, seeing that the discussion was in some way painful to her, suddenly changed the conversation.

"I haven't told you that we came near to having a death on our place last night, and under very tragic circumstances too."

Cousin Priscilla was on the *qui vive* at once. "Yes? who was it?"

"Only Ezra. He had everybody on the place up rushing around for all the doctors in the neighborhood, who, of course, were not to be found, and it was only after he had swallowed half the contents of mother's medicine chest, that his groans and cries, or rather, howls, ceased. That was just at

dawn, so I was unable to snatch more than an hour's sleep. If I am unusually stupid to-day, I hope you'll kindly remember that fact."

"But what could have been the cause of so violent an attack?"

"The wedding supper. I thought certainly Champ and Connie would be answerable for one human life, at least."

"Champ would say that it served the rascal right for playing the spy upon him," laughed Christie. "But how is he now? Out of danger, I hope."

"Oh yes, but he looks rather broken down this morning,—so hollow-eyed and mournful that it would go to your heart to see him. 'I don' want Mars. Champ ter git married no mo',' he said sorrowfully, but by to-morrow he will again have changed his mind."

For more than a week all was light and mirth and feasting in the old mansion, and in the cabins were nightly revels. "Chris'mus comes but onct er year," said the negroes, and they made the most of it. None saw the fatal hand-writing on the wall nor heard the mutterings of the coming storm so soon to break over the beloved old State, leaving in its path only desolation and ruin.

CHAPTER IX.

THE WHIRLIGIG OF TIME.

ON their return Champney and Constance took up their abode at Oakwood, where she had spent most of her life. She was strongly attached to the place, and, out of deference to her wishes, he consented that they should reside there rather than on the plantation his father had given him. It was distant some miles from Malvern, but was near enough for frequent visits to be exchanged between the two families.

Some months of quiet happiness passed for the young pair, unalloyed save for the ominous sounds of approaching war, which, every day, were making themselves more distinctly heard. Well might Virginia pause and reflect before joining the ranks of the seceded States. Wise men foresaw what afterwards proved to be the case—that upon her soil would the chief struggle take place.

At last the die was cast. The Old Dominion was declared no longer one of the United States, and from that time earnest, vigorous preparations for war were made within all her borders. Champney, his father, Carroll Massey, and, indeed, all the able-bodied men of their section of the State, were enrolled in military organizations and held themselves in readiness to obey the summons to arms at any moment. Constance returned to Malvern to remain during her

husband's absence. Not once had the young wife endeavored to dissuade him from his purpose, nor would she even though her heart should break in the parting that was so hard to bear. With pale, unsmiling faces the three women, Mrs. Royston and her grand-daughters, made their dear ones ready for the fray.

Ah, the bleeding hearts that were laid upon the altar of our country in those sanguinary days! If our cause was a mistaken one, that does not lessen the heroism of our women or of those brave ones who went forth with the cry of "God and the Right" on their lips. Yes, we believed ourselves in the right,—and we asked God's blessing on our cause in the full faith that it would be given.

To Christie the breaking out of hostilities brought a trial of more than ordinary weight. Not yet had she been able to forget Felix Bradford. In vain had she told herself that he cared nothing for her—that he had never done so. Some look or word of his would always come back to her, belying the supposition. She felt that there had been some mistake—she could not tell what—but she could not entirely let go her belief in his love for her. Then she would chide herself for her weakness, and after war was assured, said to herself that it was now her bounden duty to forget him and everything connected with him. Never could she, under any circumstances, bring herself to marry a man who had willfully and deliberately taken up arms against her native State—against those who were dearest of all the world to her.

Sometimes she would almost persuade herself that her past affection was changed to hatred as intense as it had been strong, and she then became so kind to

Carroll that he began to urge her marriage with him before he should leave for the army. Her friends all joined him in this, and often she was on the point of yielding, but always that inward monitor would whisper that she had no right to promise him the love it was not hers to give.

Finally, she told him all—how, deluded as to Felix Bradford's feelings for herself, she had unconsciously learned to care for him in a way that had brought her only pain. There was humiliation in the confession, and it had caused her a severe struggle to make it. But he assured her that it had been only a young girl's fancy—that he was willing still to risk his happiness in her keeping. Then she begged for at least a few months' delay in making her decision to which he at length reluctantly consented. But when he left her, his heart was beating high with hope for the future. "We'll whip out these Yankees in a few weeks," he said, as many another short-sighted youth said with him, "and then for home and Christie. She will be entirely cured of her fancy by that time, and we will forget that this man ever came between us." How was it possible that it should be otherwise? He had never yet been disappointed in the slightest wish, and it would not be the case now. And so he went away, not a whit cast down or dismayed by what he considered only an awkward *contretemps*. Little guessed he where and under what circumstances he would next meet her who was so dear to him.

Two years passed, and in all that time, Carroll had not once been home. For long months he was a prisoner, and had only recently been exchanged. Many a bloody battle had been fought upon Virginian soil, many a family left homeless, and still the pitiless tide

of war swept on nor showed the slightest sign of abatement.

More than once had the quiet valley surrounding Malvern resounded to the clash of arms, and more than one grave by the way-side told the passer-by that here men had been engaged in the pastime of butchering each other. Troops had been quartered on the Malvern plantation many times over, sometimes wearing the Blue, sometimes the Gray. The trembling inmates of the old mansion had learned almost equally to dread each. Many of the negroes had deserted them, and oftentimes the supplies in granary and larder were but scanty for their own needs. Mrs. Massey and almost all their old friends had sought safety elsewhere.

At length, Constance and Christie besought their grandmother to do the same, but she could not be persuaded. It would break her heart to leave the home that had been hers for nearly sixty years. She looked an old, old woman now, so gray and worn that one would scarcely have recognized her as the busy, active mistress of the Malvern of two years ago. Mammy Judy would sometimes look at her, her black face working with its pent-up emotion, and then she would turn away to have her cry out in some secluded corner. "She's a-gittin' ready ter leave us, I jes' knows she is," she would sob. "She looks like a angel a'ready." The two younger women did what they could to brighten her life, but she knew too well the canker that was all the while so remorselessly eating into their own hearts.

One fatal day came the tidings that Champney was "missing." They had learned the significance of that dread word. They had seen more than one life blasted

by long months of agonized suspense, only to end in utter despair. Mrs. Royston bore up bravely for a time, but at last her strength failed her. One day she did not rise from her bed at the usual hour, and she never left it again. But she lingered on through the lovely autumn, her face daily growing more shadowy and spirituelle in its expression. One afternoon, Christie sat beside her, reading to her from one of her favorite books. Her bed had been drawn near the window, that she might watch the sun set behind the distant mountains. She lay listening and looking, a wistful sadness in the sunken eyes. Suddenly she said, "Close your book now, Christie. I want you to talk to me."

Christie did as she was bidden. Taking the withered hand into her own, she stroked it softly, but remained silent.

"There is something I want to ask you, my daughter—something that it has been often in my heart to say to you, but I could never bring myself to do it. Didn't you and Felix Bradford love each other?"

Christie started. She had never suspected that her grandmother had fathomed her secret, and she had not told her, lest it might give her pain. "No, grandmother; at least, he didn't love me. At one time I thought I loved him."

"And you do so no longer?"

"I don't know—I cannot say. I have tried to forget him."

Mrs. Royston lay quiet for some time, her eyes fixed upon the glowing sun-set. A faint reflection of color lighted up the faded face. "She must be having a glimpse of Heaven," thought Christie.

Presently, her lips moved as though in invocation

of a Superior Power. "Christie," she said, pressing her grand-daughter's hand.

"Yes, grandmamma."

"You know how bitter has been my hatred of the Yankees?"

"Yes, dear grandmamma, but don't worry about that now. It was only hatred in the abstract; you never really disliked one single human being in all your life."

"Well, I have lived to have all that burned out of me. I can see more clearly now. I was very unreasonable. I expect to meet many of them beyond the Pearly Gates, Christie."

"I am sure you will, grandmamma."

"And your mother—poor Christabel—I shall see her too. She was a Northern woman, you know."

"No, I didn't know, grandmamma. I know little of her. It always seemed a painful theme to you and my father and I didn't like to question you. And Mammy Judy would tell me nothing."

"There is nothing to tell except that your father married her just after leaving College and brought her home to me. He, as the youngest son, made his home with me, you know, and I was terribly prejudiced at first, and did the poor darling grave injustice. But it all came right at last, and we learned to love each other very dearly. She forgave me fully and freely when she was dying. Judy, poor ignorant creature, imbibed my prejudices, and would never tell you, because she felt that Mars. Dudley had, in some measure, disgraced the family by marrying 'a Yankee who had no niggers.' Your mother was a lovely woman, Christie—lovely in mind, person, and character. You remind me very strongly of her in many ways."

"I am glad of that, grandmamma."

"Yes," continued Mrs. Royston musingly, "I shall see her, and we'll talk it all over there where only truth can be known. Christie, if Felix Bradford ever offers you his love, and you still love him, you have my sanction to your marriage."

"Oh, grandmamma, I could never marry him now. Only think! he might be my brother's murderer!" and she shudderingly hid her face in her hands.

A gray shadow also crept over Mrs. Royston's face, leaving the lips livid and trembling; then she said, "No, Christie, Champney is still living. I am sure it is so. Only of late have I believed it to be the case, and I have thought that, possibly, we who are on the borders of the other world are given to know these things. But if I am wrong—if it is with my boy as I have feared, don't blame Felix Bradford with his death. He is not in the least to be held responsible for such a calamity. He loved Champney dearly, and would, I verily believe, have laid down his life for him. He is a noble man, Christie—in every way worthy of you. I watched him closely while he was here. You thought I was wholly taken up with Champ's and Connie's happiness, but I was thinking of you, too, my darling. I watched him with jealous eyes, and I was forced in spite of myself, to acknowledge his superiority to most men I had known. I wanted you to marry Carroll—I admit it—but I see now I was wrong. He will suffer for a time, but not always, Christie. He has too keen a sense of right to wish you to marry him if you don't love him. You were wiser than we; you did right to refuse him."

"Oh, grandmamma, I am so glad to hear you say

so. I had feared that you blamed me for my obstinacy."

"No, I have not blamed you. I knew that the affections could not be coerced. But I will confess to having hoped that time would obliterate the recollection of that other love which I saw had come between you and Carroll's wishes. And now I must rest, my dear. I am very tired."

Christie arranged her pillows more comfortably, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing her quietly asleep. A sense of peace stole into her own heart to which she had long been a stranger, and leaning her head against the back of the easy chair in which she was seated, she too fell into a gentle slumber. So Constance found them an hour afterward when she came in to tell Christie that her father had arrived. He had at last succeeded in obtaining a short furlough in order once more to visit his dying mother. She remained with them only a few days longer, passing away very peacefully at the last.

"Take care of my dear ones when I am gone," she said to Uncle Daniel and the sobbing Mammy Judy who stood at the foot of her bed.

"We will, Mistis, the Lord helpin' us, we will," said he in a choked voice, and Mammy Judy, falling upon her knees, prayed brokenly.

"Connie, find Champncy," were the last words that fell from her lips. They laid her "under the daisies,"—the dear grandmamma—beside the husband of her youth who had so long preceded her to the spirit-world.

They turned away from her grave sorrowing, yet they could not wish her back. She was safe now from the grinding cares that had so harrowed her gentle

soul during her last days. Few of her old friends were there. They were scattered far and wide, weary wanderers upon the face of the earth, and some of them, perchance, she found awaiting her at the Heavenly Gates.

That night, the forlorn remnant of the once happy family sat together in the library at Malvern. They were silent, each busy with the sad thoughts and memories that thronged upon them. Constance was the first to speak.

"Father, you heard grandmamma's last words?"

"Yes."

"I shall obey her commands. I shall start tomorrow to find Champney."

"My daughter, think what you are doing—to what dangers you are exposing yourself and how fruitless your errand is likely to be."

"I am not afraid. God will take care of me."

"But what will you do? Where can you go? I must return in a few days to my command and can afford you no protection."

"I know; my plans are all made—have been for some time, but I couldn't put them into execution while dear grandmamma and Christie needed me. Now Christie can go to Richmond and Uncle Daniel and Mummy Judy can take care of the home."

"Let me go with you, Connie," said Christie, eagerly.

"No, dear, I cannot consent that you should be exposed to unnecessary danger. I could never forgive myself if any evil came to you through me. Besides, I want to go at once, and I was depending upon you to look after the few valuables we have left. Then too, father will need you while he is at home."

"I cannot consent to your engaging in so hazardous an undertaking, Christie," said her father. "Connie can do as she likes—I will not oppose her, and somehow she inspires me with confidence in the success of her plans. Will you tell me them in full, my dear?"

"Surely, father; I wouldn't have gone without first consulting you. First, I have a sum of money in gold which I used laughingly to tell Champney I was putting by for 'a rainy day.' The time to use it has now come. Mammy Huldah cheerfully consents to go with me. She has watched over me from infancy and wouldn't willingly be separated from me now. General A—— has obtained passports for us through the lines. I shall go first to my uncle in New York. Then I shall search every Northern prison until my husband is found. That I will find him I feel sure. You will not oppose me, father? I must go."

"No, I cannot; and yet it is a fearful risk you are running. I shudder to think what may be your fate."

"I have thought of everything, and nothing seems to me so horrible as this dreadful suspense. To sit and wait with folded hands—ah, I cannot—I cannot. I should go mad. I thank you, father, for your consent, though I must have gone even had you not given it."

They sat and talked of the matter until all reasoned themselves into the belief that Champney was still among the living. Of what worth would life be with hope destroyed? At their evening devotions, the Divine aid and protection were invoked for her who would go forth on the morrow, like another Evangeline, in search of him to whom she had plighted her

faith. Mr. Royston and Christie accompanied her as far as possible on her way, and then, commending her to Heaven's care, sorrowfully retraced their steps to their lonely home.

Christie, now, for the first time, noticed how thin and pale her father was looking. Always reticent as to himself, she had not guessed how the uncertain fate of his only son had worn upon him. Added to this, the distracted state of the country, the loss of his mother, the comparatively unprotected situation of his only remaining child, the anxiety as to Connie's fate, and his impoverished condition financially, and it will be conceded that he had sufficient cause for uneasiness. She reproached herself, that in her absorption in her own sorrow, she had thought so little of his.

She now strove, by every means in her power, to soothe and comfort him, but he met all her efforts in his behalf with the same sad, absent smile. Once, when she was hovering about him, he took her hand in his and said, "Sit down, my daughter. I have something to say to you."

She obeyed him, and quietly waited for him to speak. He was silent for some time longer, apparently absorbed in thought. At length, arousing himself, he said, "Christie, have you heard recently from Carroll Massey?"

"I had a letter last week—on Tuesday, I think."

"Does he still desire that you should marry him?"

"Yes, father."

"Christie, do you realize how unprotected you would be should I share Champney's fate? and it may be mine any day."

"Don't speak of it, father, please," she answered, with a shudder.

"I must, my dear. These are stern facts that must be looked squarely in the face. To whom can you apply for assistance, if, as I fear may be the case, you are left alone, and your friends equally impoverished with yourself? I wish you were safe in Texas, with Lewis, but the journey is too hazardous for you to undertake it without a thoroughly reliable escort."

"Don't worry about me, father. I'll be taken care of in some way."

"I wish I could see how. Christie, if Carroll comes to you, and again urges you to marry him, I wish, for your own sake, you could make up your mind to do so. It would be a great relief for me to know that you had, at least, the protection of his name; and then, you could go to his mother. As it is, the thought is ever before me like a grim specter, 'What will become of my child if my life should be taken?'"

"Father, dear father, don't allow yourself to think of it. I am young and strong. I can take care of myself should the worst come to the worst."

"You poor child, what can you do? I wish you would promise me to marry Carroll."

"What if I don't love him, father?"

"You think you do not, but I am sure you are mistaken. It is only because you have been brought up together as brother and sister might have been. You have indulged in romances until you are expecting some mad passion to take possession of you when the wonderful knight shall make his appearance. Believe me, a sober, earnest affection, such as I know you to entertain for Carroll, is the most solid founda-

tion for your future happiness. My child, I wish you could gratify me in this."

"I wish I could, father."

"Don't you think you can?"—this so pleadingly that she felt her courage failing her.

"Oh, father, don't urge me now. Give me a little time to think of it."

"Until to-morrow morning, then. Remember, I shall expect a definite answer."

"Very well, father," she said, but so falteringly that the words were rather whispered than spoken.

He kissed her fondly. "Go then, dear, to your own room and think over the matter earnestly—prayerfully."

She went, her mind a whirl of confused thoughts. Falling on her knees beside her bed, she tried to pray, but could only utter a feeble cry for help—help to decide what was to her a question of life or death. "Have I the right to sacrifice my filial duty to a sentiment?" she would ask herself, and again the recollection of the wrong she would be doing Carroll would renew the conflict. How long she had knelt there she did not know, but she was still no nearer a decision when she was roused by a hurried knock at her door. She started up and said in a voice she scarcely recognized as her own, "Who's there?"

The door was opened at once and Mammy Judy came in with a frightened face. "Honey! Miss Christie," she said excitedly, catching her young mistress' hands in hers and leading her forward, "come down-sta'rs with me ter Marster. I dunno whut's the matter with him. He look ser strange, an' when I spoke ter him jes' now, he didn' take no mo' notice uv me'n ef I hadn' a-been thar

"Where is he?" said Christie, hurrying toward the stair-way.

"Now, honey, don' yer go ter gittin' skeered. Maybe 'tain' nothin' 'tall but jes' ole mammy's foolishness."

Running hastily down the steps, she went at once to the library, where she supposed she would find her father. He was seated just where she had left him, his head lying wearily back in his arm-chair. Upon his face was the pallor of death, and his eyes were wild and staring.

"Father!" she cried, catching up his hand. It was rigid and icy cold. "Father, oh, father, speak to me!" she implored, but no answer came from the white, compressed lips. "Mammy," she said, "tell Micah to go at once for a physician and let Uncle Daniel and some of the men come and lift my father to his bed. Come back as quickly as you can and help me to restore him to consciousness."

Mammy Judy hastened to carry out her instructions. "The Lord on'y know whar we'll fin' a doctor," she muttered to herself as she went. "Ole Dr. Winston, he had ter go off ter the army when he knowed how we all needed him yere at home, an' I ain't got a bit o' faith in these young spregs o' soljers 'at think they knows ser much. Howsomever, beggers mus'n be choosers, an' I'll be glad ernough ter git anybody."

She soon returned with Uncle Daniel and two other men, and they carried the apparently lifeless body of her master to his own room. He was undressed and placed comfortably in bed, and she and Christie used every means of resuscitation known to them, but all without avail. At last the doctor came

—a young army surgeon belonging to a command stationed not far from them. Christie knew him, as he had visited her grandmother. "Oh, Dr. Brown, can nothing be done for him?" she pleaded.

"I can't tell, Miss Royston. We will do what we can."

"His heart still beats," she said, eagerly.

"There is always hope while life lasts," he answered.

At last, after what seemed to her an eternity of time, there came a long shuddering sigh from the sick man, his mouth relaxed, and a look of intelligence gradually stole into the vacant face.

"Thank God," said Christie; and, burying her face in the bed-clothes, for the first time she wept. But still her father could neither move nor speak.

"It is paralysis," explained the physician in a low tone, that it might not reach his patient's ears. "He may remain in this state for some hours—I can't tell—but I am now hopeful of his eventual recovery. This, I presume, is his first stroke."

"Yes."

"Then I am more hopeful still. Cheer up, Miss Royston. You have no need to despair."

Leaving instructions as to the course of treatment to be pursued, he left, promising to return early the next morning. Christie, Mammy Judy and Uncle Daniel remained in the sick-room all night. His young mistress tried to persuade the latter to go home and lie down, but he steadfastly refused to do so. "I promused yer gran'ma on her dyin' bed ter take keer o' yer all, Miss Christie, an', please God, I'm a-goin' ter do it." Many times during the succeeding illness of her father had Christie cause for deep, heart-felt

gratitude for the faithful affection of the two old servants.

The next morning she saw that the invalid was evidently conscious of all that was passing about him. Looking into his eyes, she read there such an agony of appeal that, falling on her knees beside the bed and passionately kissing the pale face, she said, "Yes, father, I know of what you are thinking. You are waiting for my answer. I will do as you wish." The look of pain was succeeded by one of pleasure, and soon, closing his eyes, he fell into a soothing slumber. "Oh, God, what have I done?" cried Christie, moaning and wringing her hands, as she paced the floor of her own room during the few moments in which she had stolen from the sick chamber, leaving her father in Mammy Judy's care. And then came a storm of self-reproach that she should think of herself now when her father lay "sick unto death." She soon returned, pale, but calm, and resumed her office of sick-nurse.

Several days passed, during which her father remained as one dead, save for the speaking eyes. One day, Christie heard the firing of guns in the direction of the railway station. Taking up the spy-glass, she mounted to the cupola of the house in the hope of being able to discover the cause. As the smoke cleared away, she saw that it was a skirmish of cavalry, such as often occurred in the surrounding valley. After a time, the Confederates were forced to retreat. Turning her glass in another direction, she perceived that the squad of cavalry she had seen was but the advance-guard of the Federal army, which was approaching along the line of railway.

Ere many hours had passed, soldiers wearing the dreaded blue uniform filled the house and thronged

the place. At Uncle Daniel's intercession, a guard was placed over the premises, thus, to some extent, insuring Christie's safety. Two weary days and nights dragged themselves by, during which she had scarcely closed her eyes in sleep. All her thoughts had been concentrated upon her father. She felt sure that he knew what was going on about him, and rarely left him, in order that he might be spared all anxiety concerning her.

On the night of the third day, he having fallen into a quiet slumber, Mammy Judy said, "Now, honey, yer mus' go right up ter yer room an' lay down an' see ef yer ca' git a little sleep. Yer's mos' wore out, that yer is, an' I'll have yer sick on my han's fus' thing anybody know. You nee'nter be oneasy about Marster. Me an' Dan'l 'll take good keer o' him."

She felt so exhausted that she allowed herself to be persuaded. "Call me at once if my father should awake," she said, as she left them. She threw herself, still dressed, upon her bed, and almost in a moment slept profoundly.

"I wouldn't tell her, Judy," said Uncle Daniel, when she was gone, "but I feels sorter oneasy about them soljers out thar ter-night. They've got a-holt o' the wine in the cellar, an' they've been a-drinkin' too much uv it. We'll ha'ter keep our eyes open, ole lady."

After a time, Mammy Judy, looking out of the window and seeing a light in the direction of their cabin, said, "Dan'l, I'm awful afeard 'at some o' them sneakin' Yankces is a-stealin' our chickens. I ain't got but a mighty few lef', an' I needs 'em all fur soup fur Marster. Don't yer think yer'd better go an' see

ef yer ca' stop 'em? Tell 'em how sick he is, an' maybe they'll let 'em alone."

Uncle Daniel obeyed her, but it must be confessed with great reluctance. Soon after he was gone, hearing a great uproar in the dining-room, she went to see what could be the cause, as she feared it might disturb her master and Christie. Several soldiers were there, sitting on the table, chairs, or anything that was convenient, sipping wine and singing gay drinking songs.

"Fur the love o' God, gen'lemen," said mammy, "don' make ser much noise. My po' sick marster's asleep, an' I'm afcard yer'll wake him."

Up to this time they had treated her very civilly, but now they were heated with wine and filled with reckless gaiety. "Come and have a drink with us, old lady," cried one.

"I thank yer kindly, sir, but I mus' go back ter my marster," she answered, at the same time making the very nicest "curchy" of which she was capable.

"Pshaw! drink, I say!" he continued, coming toward her with a brimming glass of wine.

With a series of the politest "dips" she could make, she again refused, and was turning away when she found herself surrounded by a number of merry, laughing men, one of whom held a glass of wine to her lips.

Now, truth to tell, mammy was very fond of wine, and when she inhaled the delightful aroma, the temptation to obey was very great, but she resolutely closed her lips and shook her head.

"Drink, or, by thunder, I'll make you!" exclaimed the one who had first proposed that she should do so.

Partly from the desire to escape their rudeness, and partly also from inclination, she drained the glass to the bottom. Then she was allowed to return to her post. It was not many minutes before she began to see surrounding objects as through a mist, and soon afterwards, she was snoring in her chair. Poor mammy! she had lost much sleep, and the wine proved such a soporific as she could not resist.

Meantime, Uncle Daniel had found that Mammy Judy's surmises as to the danger threatening their feathered property were correct. In fact, their hen-roost was actually being robbed. Finding his pleas of no avail, he forgot himself and uttered such threats as would have been of awful import could he have carried them into execution. "Keep a civil tongue in your head, will you?" said one. This only provoked him the more, and finally, partly in fun, and partly because he really annoyed them, they tied him to a tree hard by, and left him there. Too late he saw his error, and he could only hope that no further harm would come of it. He had only to wait patiently, and some one of the negroes would find and release him. In the meantime, Mammy Judy was on duty at the house and would take care of its inmates.

Consoling himself with this thought, he sat down on the ground, leaned his head against the tree, and very soon he, too, was in the land of dreams. Suddenly he awoke. A brilliant light was shining all about him. He rubbed his eyes in bewilderment. It was some moments before he could realize where he was. Then he looked toward the house. He sprang up, and, with a Herculean effort, wrenched his hands free. They were torn and bleeding, but he gave no heed to that. "My God," he cried, "the house is

afire an' they'll be burnt up!" He sped away as though on the wings of the wind. He rushed into the burning building, crying, "Marster! Judy! Miss Christie! fur the Lord's sake, save yerselves! The house is afire!" He found his way, in spite of smoke and flame, to his master's room. He saw Mammy Judy asleep in her chair. Dragging her to her feet and shaking her soundly, he shouted, "Judy! Judy! fur God's sake, help me ter save Marster!" He succeeded at last in rousing her so that she understood him. "Yere! I'll take hol' uv his shoulders—you take his feet. Easy now—easy—don't hurt him."

Through the blinding smoke they made their way out. As rapidly as they could, they carried him to a safe distance from the falling cinders, and laid him on the ground. "You take keer uv him now, Judy, whils' I go back fur Miss Christie," said Uncle Daniel. He hurried back, almost breathless with anxiety. A group of men in Federal uniforms, looking dazed and bewildered, stood near the house, which was now a mass of flames. As he rushed past, one of them guessing his object, cried out, "Don't try to go in, old man—it is certain death," but he gave no heed to him.

Already the heat was so great as to be almost intolerable, but he kept steadily on. Suddenly he felt his brain whirl as he saw the roof falling in. A thunderous crash, a leaping upward of a great pyramid of fire, and the old mansion, which had seemed to him to have been built for all time, was a heap of ruins. He fell on his knees and raised his trembling hands to Heaven, while the tears streamed over his face. "Mistis, my mistis," he cried, "yer sees how it wus. Yer knows I'd a-saved her ef I could. I didn' furgit my promus. Oh, Lord! oh, Lord! that I should a-lived ter see

this awful night!" Rising, he tottered forward, reeling like a drunken man. As he passed the awe-stricken soldiers, one of them began to utter some words of condolence. Uncle Daniel waved him off. "Don' yer dar' ter speak ter me! Yer ain't nothin' but devils in humun flesh!"

"We didn't do it purposely, old man. It was all an accident. We have but just escaped ourselves," but he passed on as though he had not heard them.

When Mammy Judy saw him coming, she hastened to meet him. "Oh, Dan'l, whar's Miss Christie?"

"Don't ask me, woman," he answered in a harsh hollow voice. "I lef' yer ter take keer uv her, an' like the dusciples uv our Lord, yer went ter sleep at yer pos'. Whut happened ter Him?" Then he broke down. He fell on the ground and sobbed aloud. "Oh, Judy, ef the ole man jes' could a-gone in her place. But maybe it's better so—better so. It's awful times fur us all, an' she's safe with Mistis and Mars. Champ now. Come, Judy, we're a-furgittin' po' Marster. 'Twon' do fur him ter lay out yere in the night air no longer."

They went back to him. His face looked death-like in the fitful glare of the burning building. Mammy Judy bent over him. "Dan'l," she said huskily, "come quick; I b'lieve he's fainted."

Uncle Daniel peered eagerly over her shoulder. "No, Judy," he said solemnly, "he's gone ter jine them t'other angels up hyonder whar trouble ca' come no mo'. The Lord's been good ter him. He wouldn' let him live atter all the res' wus gone."

Silently, save for the moaning and sobbing of Mammy Judy, they lifted the rigid form, and, pausing for a moment's rest now and then, bore it reverently away.

CHAPTER X.

QUITS.

CHRISTIE had been roused from her slumber by feeling herself caught up in strong arms and borne down the stairway through smoke so dense as almost to threaten suffocation. "Don't struggle," said a voice which even then she recognized as that of Felix Bradford. At once she became quiet and allowed herself to be carried out of the house. Then as she felt the keen frosty air upon her face, her senses were fully restored and she again attempted to free herself.

"My father! Where is my father? Oh, save him," she cried.

"I will send some men to look after him. Do not fear," said her preserver.

At that moment the air became thick with flying sparks, and the earth shook as the roof and walls fell in. Christie shrieked in agony. "Oh, my father! my father!"

Felix Bradford held her closer and spoke to her soothingly, but she tore herself from his grasp, and, frenzied with the thought of her father's horrible fate, would have thrown herself into the flames in a vain attempt at rescue had he not again seized and forcibly detained her.

"Don't, Miss Royston. Try to calm yourself. All hope is not yet lost. Perhaps he was saved, after all."

But after a vigilant search, there came the mournful tidings that he was nowhere to be seen.

"Let us go to Uncle Daniel's cabin," said Christie, with the calmness of despair. "He may be there."

She guided them to it, but they found it dark, silent, and deserted. Their children lived at the quarter some distance away. Messengers were dispatched thither to make inquiry. They had seen nothing of their parents since the evening before. A soldier now came forward who asserted that he had seen the old man rush into the flames, calling on his wife and master, and that he had never returned.

Christie was forced to the belief that all save herself had perished. She fell upon the ground and cowered there, her face hidden in her hands. Convulsive shudders passed over her frame and hysterical sobs rose into her throat, but her eyes were dry and tearless. Felix Bradford stood looking down at her with feelings of deepest commiseration. What would he not have given for the right to take her into his arms and shield her from all further harm! At length he motioned to his men to leave them. They moved away and stood at a respectful distance. He sat down beside her and took her hand into his. Shudderingly she withdrew it.

"As you please, Miss Royston," he said, mournfully. "I cannot blame you. I know in what an offensive light I must now appear to you. But I must provide for your safety. Where can you go? Who of your old friends is in the neighborhood?"

"No one; the few who had remained were frightened away during the last few days. I would have gone also but that my father was a helpless paralytic, unable to be removed."

"Were you and he the only occupants of the old home?"

"Yes."

"Your grandmother?"

"Is where this dark trouble cannot reach her, thank God."

"And Champney?"

She shuddered and looked piteously at him. "I am alone in the world now. Alone—alone," she kept repeating to herself, as if trying to fathom the full depth of woe contained in the word.

"Where is your husband, may I ask?"

"I have no husband."

"Are you then a widow?"

"No."

"Did you not marry Carroll Massey?"

"No."

"Miss Royston, forgive me if I ask still another question, which you may consider an unwarrantable one. Are you engaged to be married to him?"

"No."

The dark face softened, the firm lips trembled a little, and a light came into his eyes which she did not see. She had not once looked up since he began to question her concerning Carroll. He had again risen and stood for some moments silently regarding her bowed, crushed figure. There was a misty splendor in the dark eyes now, and once he moved impulsively toward her, but, the next moment, he recollected himself, and resumed his former position. His brows were knotted in painful perplexity, as he stood there absently grinding a pebble into the ground with the heel of his boot. At last he spoke—in a calm,

unshaken voice, although his heart was beating like a hammer in his breast.

"Christie," he said, "I am about to make what may seem a startling proposition to you. Nothing but the urgency of the case can justify me in doing so. Marry me, that I may be able to secure your safety."

She started up with a bound, her eyes blazing with indignation. Her chest heaved and she seemed vainly struggling for words. At last they came, hissing hot as a lava-torrent. "How dare you suggest such a thing to me? You have murdered my brother. My grandmother lies in the old garden there dead of a broken heart in consequence. My father and my faithful servants are buried beneath the burning ruins of my home—all through the agency of those fiends you call your friends. I am friendless, homeless—with not where to lay my head. Ah, God, that it might be in my grave. It is the only refuge left me now." She wrung her hands in agony. Then she turned fiercely upon him. "Go, go from my sight," she cried. "Go bring back my father and brother—restore to me the home of my ancestors before you dare again to intrude yourself upon me. No words can tell how utterly I loathe—abhor you!"

She stood panting and breathless, her hands clenched so tightly that the nails pressed cruelly into the delicate palms. Then came a fit of trembling and she was forced to lean against a tree for support. He remained quietly standing where he was, with folded arms, but his eyes were filled with an infinite compassion. When he spoke it was with a calm dignity of manner that impressed her even in her unnaturally excited state.

"Nevertheless, Christie, I must take care of you.

I shall not leave you until you are safe. You will see that you have judged me somewhat harshly when you are less excited than now. That your grandmother and Champney are dead I learn to-night for the first time—also that your father was an invalid. No one can regret these facts more than I. The burning of your home, I am told, was an accident—through the careless handling of matches by some of the guard, most probably. This I learn from the one man of them who is still on the ground. The rest have all skulked away—through fear of punishment, no doubt. That they will be punished, you may rest assured.”

“That will not bring back those who are gone.”

The pathos of the words went to his heart. “I am as fully alive to that fact as you can be,” he sorrowfully returned. “Christie,” he suddenly burst out, catching her hand in both of his and forcibly retaining it, “Would to God that I could bear all this terrible sorrow for you. Oh, my love, my love, you cannot know how I long to comfort you.”

She was touched in spite of herself. His words were like balm to her lonely, aching heart. She dared not meet his eyes. “I thank you for your sympathy,” she said, but in a cold, hard voice.

Again there was silence for some moments during which she made no effort to remove her hand from his grasp—probably because she felt it to be useless. “Have you friends in Richmond?” he asked, at last voluntarily releasing her hand.

“Yes; Cousin Priscilla.”

“Why not go to her?”

“You forget that I have no money. You have left me nothing but the clothes I wear.”

“But I have money,” he said, eagerly, “and you

must take it. You forced yours upon me when I was in a similar strait."

"Ah, but that was different."

"I can not see in what way."

"I was not then your enemy."

"Nor am I yours."

"Your words are but a mockery when you are daily laying waste the land of my birth."

"Would you have me draw my sword in its defence?"

"No, not that ; I would not have you recreant to what I know to be your principles, but, surely, you need not have come to destroy those for whom you once professed such strong friendship."

"It is useless for us to discuss this question, Christie," he said, sadly. "We could never see the matter in the same light. You would never understand that in the course I have taken I have been impelled by a stern sense of duty."

"These are the noble deeds with which you boasted you would fill your life," she said, mockingly. "How exultant you must be at thought of your success. Happy homes destroyed, the hearts of women broken, the"—

"For God's sake, hush, Christie," he cried, passionately. "I can not bear it."

"Ah, it touches you, does it? Yet you have suffered nothing. What if our armies should in turn be the invaders of your own land ; your mother and sister subjected to the fate which has overtaken me and thousands of others?"

"Don't, Christie," he pleaded. "You and I are in no way responsible for this dreadful state of affairs. We are but the victims of that fate which plays with

nations as with individuals. But come, we must be going. You are shivering with cold. I can have no peace of mind until your safety is assured."

She was indeed shaking as with an ague fit, and there was a wild light in her eyes which he shuddered to see. "I can accept nothing more from you," she said. "Thus far, we are quits. You tell me that I once saved your life and now you have saved mine. The weight of obligation which seemed to press so heavily upon you is now removed, and I need not thank you for what to me is worthless, since all I had to brighten it is gone. Go and leave me to my fate. I care not what it may be."

"Christie, this is sheer madness. How could I leave you, a helpless woman, among a lot of demoralized negroes and rude soldiery, who, however well disciplined, can not always be held in check? Were you a beggar instead of what you are to me, I would not be guilty of such a crime. I am doing nothing for you since you will have it so; it is only in the sacred cause of humanity. Christie, come!"

The words, so pleading, so full of pitying tenderness, made themselves felt. She trembled like a reed in the wind, but still she stood silent and obdurate. He caught both the icy hands into his, and held them firmly while he looked straight into the burning eyes. "Christie—Miss Royston," he said, in a commanding tone, "you *must* obey me. I shall send you under a flag of truce to your friends in Richmond, and that at once. Come, we will go now," and, drawing one of her hands under his arm he led her away.

She made no resistance. There was no gainsaying that masterful tone.

"I am your prisoner," she faltered—"wholly in your power. What you choose to command I must obey."

As they reached the brow of the hill, she looked back for a last, lingering glance at the dear old place, which she might, perhaps, be leaving forever. At this moment a huge tongue of flame shot upward, and wavered and danced in the air as if gloating over its ghastly work. Its flickering shadows played weirdly over her grandmother's new-made grave, and the marble shaft that rose over that of her mother. This sight brought back the recollection of the dreadful events of the past few days with overwhelming force. At thought of the dear ones lying buried there, and of those equally dear who might never rest beside them, the wild eyes began to droop, the hard lines about the mouth to soften, and, ere she was aware, a flood of tears came to her relief.

"There, that's right," said her companion. "Lean your poor, tired head on my shoulder and have your cry out."

She felt a touch, light as that of a thistle-down, yet which thrilled her being to its centre, upon the mass of rippling hair. But neither words nor act gave her offense. The storm of passion was over now, and she was as weak as a child. She tottered, and would have fallen but for his supporting arm. She heard his murmured words of tenderness, and felt their sweetness to the inmost core of her heart. But she knew what a Tantalean feast it was—that she was looking into a Paradise she must never enter. For one brief moment she reveled in the light and warmth of the love ready to be bestowed so lavishly upon her.

Then she raised her head, and gently disengaging herself from his embrace, stood erect.

"I am strong now," she said. "I can walk alone."

He felt the double meaning in her words. Looking into her eyes he read her secret. He knew now that she loved him, but saw also that her pride had placed an impassable barrier between them. A great wave of yearning, passionate love came over him. Impulsively he held out his arms. "Christie, my poor wounded dove, come to me!"

She grew white to the lips, but there was a brave, defiant light in her eyes. "Never!" she cried. "Between us two a great gulf is fixed. It can never be bridged."

He turned away and walked sadly on, she quietly following. Soon they reached a horse, whose bridle was held by an orderly. Her escort was saluted by the soldier as "General Bradford," and then, for the first time, she observed the insignia of his rank as brigadier-general. Silently he wrapped his great-coat about her, for the air was raw and chill, placed her upon his horse, and, taking the bridle into his own hands, led him away.

After a time, he told her how the corps of the army to which he belonged had only just come up that night, and how startled he had been when he saw the well-remembered old house in flames. He did not know whether she or any of the family were still there, but he had made what haste he could to give assistance to those who might remain. He knew which was her room, as it was opposite to that he had occupied during his visit, and so he had come in time to save her. He said little except to make this explanation. He

saw with what an effort she listened even to so much, and would not further annoy her. What thoughts passed through the minds of the hapless pair during that silent night-ride, we shall never know. Probably Christie was so benumbed by sorrow that she felt indifference to her fate, and the self-contained man beside her had only again taken up the burden, which, for a brief space of time, had fallen from his shoulders. Still, it was with a renewed sense of bitterness that he again realized that it must be forever borne. Ere morning dawned, he had bidden his captive adieu with the manner of an ordinary acquaintance, and she was safe in the railway train on her way to Richmond.

Uncle Daniel and Mammy Judy did not carry the body of their master to their cabin, because he, in his excited state, feared that some indignity might be offered it. His own temporary imprisonment, and, as he believed, the malicious destruction of the old home which to him was the most sacred spot on earth, had so wrought upon him that he was incapable of justice to his enemies. "We'll take him ter the cave, Judy," he said. "The time's come ter use it at las'." In the rear of the premises, the hill on which they stood sloped suddenly, almost precipitously, to the Catawba which surrounded it in the shape of a horse-shoe. In the side of this hill there was an ancient excavation which had been called by the negroes, time out of mind, "The Cave." There was a tradition in the family that it had once been used for the storage of ice, which, doubtless, was the purpose for which it was originally designed.

Some years before the opening of our story, after unusually heavy and protracted rains, there had been

a land-slide in which a great bowlder that had long projected from the face of the hill near its summit had fallen and effectually closed the mouth of the cave. While Champney was at home on furlough—the only visit he had made since the war began—it had occurred to him that it might be re-opened and used as a place of security for the silver and other valuables that would be likely to fall into the hands of a marauding enemy. With Uncle Daniel's assistance he went to work upon it, communicating his design only to him and Mammy Judy besides the family. As it was in a secluded portion of the grounds surrounded by a dense growth of vines and underbrush, they managed to complete their task without discovery. The new opening was made behind the great rock, and was easily concealed.

After Champney's return to the army, the frequent raids through the valley of both Federals and Confederates—one was almost as destructive as the other—convinced Uncle Daniel that it would at some time be needed as a place of refuge for the ladies of the family. So he set to work, often at night by the light of a lantern that he might evade the prying eyes of the other negroes, and enlarged the original apartment until it was of quite respectable dimensions. This he carefully cemented and otherwise made habitable. For ventilation he opened a shaft from one corner of the ceiling to the outer air. He also constructed a rude fire-place from which the smoke could find its way into this opening. Strange stories began to be rife among the negroes concerning the old cave. They affirmed that sepulchral voices and other strange sounds were often heard to proceed therefrom, and sometimes a smoke was seen to curl into the air above it which had a

decidedly sulphurous smell. Again, the strokes of a hammer would reach them, especially on dark stormy nights, and the belief rapidly gained credence among them that the Devil had made it his work-shop. Here he was supposed to take a fiendish pleasure in forging chains for the wicked who would be bound down, slowly to roast forever over a never-dying fire. The place began to be avoided, but still some of the more adventurous would occasionally risk its terrors and take "de shawt cut thoo ter Cloverdale." One night, Ezra, with staring eyes, chattering teeth, and hair on end, made his appearance in the Malvern quarters affirming that he had seen his Satanic Majesty, horns, fire-breathing nostrils, cloven hoofs, angrily-swishing tail and all. Moreover, the Devil had spit at him "jes' fur all de worl' like er ole mad Tom-cat." Many times that night he was called upon to repeat his story, and before long not a negro on the place but had heard it.

Some scoffed at it as "jes' one o' Ez's big tales," and finally, a party of them sallied out, determined to investigate the affair to the bottom. They came back sorely discomfited. They had not only seen "de ole Bad Man," but also an army of his imps standing on the rock, dancing and gibbering in a way most frightful to see. They had hoped to escape undiscovered, but had been unfortunate enough to attract the attention of the hobgoblins, and were greeted with a shower of missiles like "great balls o' fire, an' one uv 'em hit Uncle big-stick Jerry right smack in de mouf, an' he say de smell o' de sulphur wus ser monst'ous strong, it inermos' knock him down." Henceforth Uncle Daniel labored in peace. He could come and go without fear of molestation. Sometimes

he was seen to come from the direction of the dreaded spot, and gradually the rumor spread that he was in league with the Devil, and was ever on the watch to report their misdeeds. It is needless to say that he was treated with extraordinary respect in consequence. He, knowing their superstitious fears, so played upon them, that in course of time he was thought to be possessed of supernatural power almost equal to that of his alleged master. He did this, partly from a spirit of mischief, and partly because he thought it might at some time be useful to him in his self-constituted office of protector of his mistress' family. From time to time, various articles that might be needed in an emergency were carried to their place of refuge, and every few days he would light a fire to drive out the dampness.

Thither he and Mammy Judy now conveyed their master. Slowly and carefully they laid him on a rude bed in one corner. Uncle Daniel, well accustomed to the darkness, soon found the lantern and lighted it. Mammy Judy, who was kneeling at the head of the bed, suddenly said in a half-whisper, "Fetch it yere, Dan'l. I b'lieve in my soul he's alive yit."

And so it proved. Some wine was brought and placed to his lips. He could not swallow it at first, but evidently he was again conscious. "Run down ter the creek an' fetch some water, Dan'l." This was soon done, and before long they had the satisfaction of finding his breathing again becoming regular, and some warmth returning to his chilled limbs. Uncle Daniel had lighted a fire, which was now blazing cheerily. He always kept a supply of fuel ready for use.

"Daniel," called a feeble voice.

The good old man started as though one risen from the dead had spoken to him. "Yes, Marster."

"Where am I?"

"In the cave, Marster."

"Where is Christie?"

"Gone ter Richmun, Marster." "May the good Lord furgive me fur tellin' that lie," said he to himself.

"Thank God," said the sick man. "I think I'll go to sleep now, Daniel."

Yes, it was true. The shock he had undergone had restored his speech and the partial use of his limbs. Henceforward, his recovery would be only a question of time. With hearts filled with gratitude, the two old servants watched over him. "Lord, Lord," groaned Uncle Daniel, "how'll I ever tell him the trufe about Miss Christie when he comes ter his min-ag'in?"

The next morning after a careful reconnoissance to make sure that the coast was clear, Uncle Daniel set forth to his cabin to obtain some supplies for breakfast. As he was nearing it, he espied Ezra standing looking toward the smoldering ruins of Malvern. The head of the young scapegrace, crowned with a brimless straw hat, was held high in the air, his hands stuffed into the pockets of what had once been a pair of trowsers, his bare feet, with skin like that of a rhinoceros, planted squarely on the ground, and his mouth puckered into a great, round O, as he carelessly whistled "Dan Tucker."

"You, Ez," cried Uncle Daniel, wrathfully, "you lim' o' Satun, how dar' yer ter do sich a thing? A stan'in' thar a-whis'lin' one o' the devul's own chunes right over the grave, yer may say, uv po' Miss Christie! I'm a great min' ter crack yer skull fur yer."

"Ef it's de devul's, den all I's got ter say's 'at it's one o' yourn too, Unc. Dan'l," said Ezra, with an impudent leer. "What's his'n's yourn, an' whut's yourn's his'n, I's heern folks say."

"Yer raskil, jes' lemme git my han's on yer, an' I'll make yer think the ole boy's got yer sho' 'nuff."

"But dat's jes' perzackly whut I don' 'low ter do, Unc. Dan'l."

"Sich imperdunce I never see sence I wus bawn. Whut yer doin' yere, boy, anyhow? Why'n't yer at home at yer work 'stid o' traipsin' aroun' all over the face o' creashun?"

"Whut's de use o' wukin' any mo'?" said Ezra. "Ef yer makes anything de Yankees, dey comes erlong an' takes it, an' whut dey don' git 't'other folks doos. I don' see no use o' wukin' er feller's han's off jes' fur de likes 'o dem."

"Thar ain't no danger o' yer doin' that thar, Ez, nohow. I never see sich nocount niggers es these youngsters in all my bawn days; that I ain't. Whut yer goin' ter do when everything ter eat's done give out, hey?"

"Oh, dar ain't no trouble erbout dat. I'll jes' go 'long ter Washuntun an' be er soljer."

"You will, hey? That shows jes' how much sense you've got. I al'ays knowed thar wus a screw loost about yer somewhar. Want ter tu'n in an' fight Mars. Ca'ull, does yer?"

"No, sah, I ain't got nothin' ergin him, nur nobody else, but I jes' wants de fine clo'es wid de big shiny brass butt'ns like Jake's got, an' er drum whut's fitten ter beat. Yer dunno how I kin beat de drum, Unc. Dan'l. I kin fa'rly make her talk."

"'Bout all yer is fitten fur," grumbled Uncle Daniel.

"Gwine down ter camps ter see Miss Christie?" asked Ezra, apparently taking no notice of this latter remark.

"Now ef I ain't a good min' ter knock that cym-lin' head o' yourn clean off'n yer shoulders," said Uncle Daniel, swelling with indignation. "Yer ain't ser much es fitten ter take that blessid anjul's name on yer lips. Whut yer mean, boy, anyhow?"

"I means whut I says," said Ezra, whistling bars of "Susanna" in the interludes of his speech. "I axed yer ef yer wus er-gwine ter see Miss Christie, didn' I?"

"Yes, Ez, that's whut yer said." He spoke more gently now. A wild hope began to thrill him. Then he turned savagely upon his tormentor. "Speak out, boy, an' tell me whut yer mean, ur I'll grab yer by the th'roat an' drag the words out'n yer."

"I'd jes' like ter see yer do dat, Unc. Dan'l," he replied, drawing in his cheeks and chuckling nonchalantly.

Uncle Daniel changed his tactics. "Ez, tell me," he said, in a wheedling, coaxing tone,— "that's a good boy,—is Miss Christie a-livin' ? Ef yer says she is I'll bless yer ter my dyin' day."

"An' whut good'll dat do me, I likes ter know?" muttered Ezra.

"Whut did yer say, Ez ? Did yer say yes?"

"I dunno, but I seed her er-gwine off wid dem Yankees las' night atter dey'd done bu'ned up de house."

Uncle Daniel caught him by the collar and shook him until his teeth clattered in his head and his eyes looked as though they would start from their sockets.

"How did yer see this?"

"Ef yer'll lemme go, I'll tell yer—an' not berfo'," he added *sotto voce*, as he saw that he was about to be liberated.

"Now, yer raskil," said Uncle Daniel, severely, "jes' look me right straight, pine blank in the eye an' tell me all yer knows 'bout this thing."

"I dunno nothin' but whut I done tole yer. I wuser-bruisin' erroun' las' night, er-tryin' ter see whut I could see, an' jes' berfo' de house tum'led in, I seed er man—it wus dat same peaked-face man whut dey call Mr. Bradfud—dat un whut comed an' waited on Mars Champ an' Miss Connie, when dey tuk an' got ma'ied, yer knows—well, I seed him er-runnin' out o' de front do' er-totin' Miss Christie in his arms like es ef she'd er-been er baby, an' atter erwhile she tuk an' rid erway on his hoss an' him er-walkin' erlong by de side uv her—an' I ain't seed her no mo'."

"Yer scoundril, why'n't yer foller 'em up an' come back an' tell me whar she went?"

"An' have dem Yankees er-makin' sassige-meat o' me? No sah! I kep' right still dar whar I wus hid all de time. An' I thought yer wus bu'ned up too, Unc. Dan'l, clean tel I seed yer er-comin' jes' now."

"An' yer wus a-grievin' yerself mighty nigh ter death about it," said Uncle Daniel, with withering sarcasm.

"Whut'u'd er-been de use, I likes ter know? Grievin' fur yer wa'n't er gwine ter fetch yer back. An' I ses ter myse'f, ses me, well, I reckon Unc. Dan'l know now somepen 'bout how it feel ter be er-br'ilin' over de coals wid de Devul er-pilin' 'em up un'er him. Reckin ef he wus back ergin he wouldn' be ser willin ter he'p de ole Bad Man ter make his chains fur we all. An' Unc. Dan'l, when I thought erbout how yer

mus' be er-squeechin' an' er-squirmin' erroun' on dat red-hot gridiurn o' his'n, I jes' couldn' keep fum laughin' ter save my life. He! he! I r'aly couldn', Unc. Dan'l."

Uncle Daniel made a sudden dive at the grinning imp and again caught him by the collar. Ezra wriggled like an eel, but there was no escape from that vise-like grasp. Several well-aimed blows had he received upon the most exposed part of his person when he called out, "An' dis is whut yer calls blessin' me ter my dyin' day, is it?"

Uncle Daniel brought himself up with a jerk. Ezra, for once, was right. This was the blackest ingratitude for his cheering news concerning Christie—a clear case of his own "goin' back" on his word. "I did promus yer, Ez, an' I ain't one ter furgit my promuses, but yer's ernough ter pervoke a saint, boy—that yer 'is. Now I've got yer, though, I sha' let yer up tel yer sw'ars ter me berfo' high Heaven 'at whut yer's been a-tellin' me 'bout Mi-s Christie is the Lord's trufe. I'll keep yer yere a month o' Sundays, but whut I'll make yer do it. I'm like a turkle, boy. I don' never let go tel it thunder."

Ezra's head being firmly wedged between Uncle Daniel's knees, he began to find his position rather irksome, and there was something convincing in the grimly-resolute manner in which these last words had been spoken, so, although it went "turrerble ergin de grain," as he would have expressed it, he concluded to strike his colors as gracefully as possible, and bide his time for revenge. This, he felt sure, would come sooner or later—it always did, however wise or strong Uncle Daniel might consider himself to be. Ezra was

a philosopher who always made the best of an awkward situation.

"Yasser, Unc. Dan'l, I ain't er-tellin' yer no lie dis time, sho'. I seed Miss Christie er-gwine erway wid dem Yankees, an' I heerd 'em er-callin' Mr. Bradfud, Giner'l Bradfud."

"All right," said Uncle Daniel, grimly, as he slowly released his victim from his painful posture, "ef I fin's out yer've been a-tellin' me whut wa'n't so, I'll make yer wush yer never had a-been bawn,"—with which direful threat and a final cuff on the ear, he let him go.

Uncle Daniel hurried home, carried the materials for breakfast to Mammy Judy, and then hastened to the Federal camp. Under ordinary circumstances he would have done this with great reluctance, but he was willing to face a cannon's mouth if thereby he could save Christie.

With much difficulty, and after innumerable explanations, he found his way into the presence of the commanding general. No, that officer knew nothing of a young lady who had been saved from a burning house the night before. Yes, General Bradford's command had passed through the valley on a forced march—it was now many miles away. More than this he could not learn. It was with a heart torn with hope and fear that he returned to Mammy Judy. "I reckon Ez's tale mus' be so, Judy," he said. "Yer see, I was roun' at the back o' the house, an' didn't see whut was a-goin' on at the front. I'd think it 'ud a-been better ef she'd a-been bu'ned up'n ter be a pris'ner in the han's o' them Yankees, ef Mr. Bradfud wa'n't along. I ca' he'p a-thinkin' 'at he'll take keer uv her. He wus a raal gen'leman, an' no mistake, ef

he wus a Yankee. I ain't furgot that dollar he give me that time."

That day, finding there was no need for further concealment, he removed his master to his own cabin. There was a small shed-room to which he and his wife retired, leaving Mr. Royston in possession of the larger one. We will not follow that gentleman's tedious recovery during the long months in which the faithful servants ministered to his wants as if he had been of their own blood—aye, working daily and cheerfully for the very bread that he ate and the clothes that he wore. When he was stronger, Uncle Daniel told him the truth concerning Christie. No further tidings had come from her, and the poor, unhappy father was doomed to live on in wretched uncertainty as to the fate of each of his children.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE HOSPITAL.

MRS. MARSH, in warm dressing-gown and slippers, stood before her mirror brushing out the abundant masses of hair which was presently to form a coronal about her head. It had been of raven blackness but was now a silvery gray which softened and refined features that had always been too pronounced for beauty. Her mirror reflected a comely face as she gazed earnestly into its depths. She nodded pleasantly to her own image. "Yes, you are growing old, my friend—there's no doubt of that. But age is not so fearful a thing, after all." Then a shadow crossed her face. "I do feel lonely sometimes, it is true." She sighed softly. "If I only had a daughter. But God knows best. Who am I, to repine at His decrees?" She shook her brush threateningly at the image in the mirror. "For shame, when you have everything to make you happy. A comfortable home, ample means, hosts of friends—Ah, but—but—"—and another sigh finished the sentence.

But that moment there came a ring at the door-bell. It was a hesitating ring, as though it had been that of a child or one of the numerous applicants for charity whom the stress of war had driven to the wealthy, childless widow for assistance. Well was she known throughout the city as a woman of warm heart and open hand. The bell was not immediately

answered, and presently there was another ring even more hesitating than the first. Mrs. Marsh tapped her own hand-bell, but this summons also was not obeyed. She put her head out of the window. "Lizzie, Lizzie!" she called, "where are you? Don't you hear the bell! She's out at the back gate talking with Oscar, I'll be bound," she said to herself. "There's no telling when she'll hear. I'll just go to the door myself. It can be no one at this hour of the morning who will criticise my appearance."

In another moment she had opened the front door. A wild-eyed woman stood there, shivering with cold, for she was hatless and had no wrap to protect her from the biting wind.

"I beg your pardon for keeping you waiting," said Mrs. Marsh. "My maid evidently did not hear the bell. Come in. You seem to be cold."

The woman held out her hands with an imploring gesture. "Cousin Priscilla!"

"Great Heaven! Christie! What has happened? You poor child, come at once to the fire."

She caught her by the arm and led her into the hall, closed the door, and then assisted the trembling girl into her own room, where she seated her in a large easy-chair before the glowing fire. Again she tapped the bell energetically. This time it was answered. "Lizzie," she said, "bring some hot tea at once, and mind, let it be strong. And tell Susan to make some toast and poach some eggs for this young lady. When they are ready bring them here." Lizzie made no comment. She was too well accustomed to her mistress' kindly acts to wonder at anything that she might do.

"Now, Christie," said Mrs. Marsh, turning to her

and taking up one of the icy hands, "tell me what it all means. How came you here, and in this plight? Where is Cousin Lucy? And your father, and Constance, and Champney?"

Christie raised her hand as if to ward off a blow. "Don't, Cousin Priscilla. I can't tell you now. I alone am left of the household at Malvern. And Malvern is a heap of ashes."

"My God!" She knelt before her guest and chafed the cold hands. Then she buried her face in Christie's lap and her whole frame shook with the sobs she could not repress. "Oh, this terrible war. My heart will be just broken before it is over."

Christie laid her hand on her cousin's head as if she were the one to be comforted. "Don't cry, Cousin Priscilla. It does no good to cry." Her own eyes were tearless.

When her breakfast came she ate a little at Mrs. Marsh's earnest solicitation, but she did it mechanically, as though she were not aware of what she was doing. Afterward she was undressed, a warm bath and fresh clothing provided, and then she was ordered peremptorily to bed. The room was darkened, and all day Cousin Priscilla hovered about her, watching to see if she might be asleep. But always she found the eyes open in that same wide, staring gaze. It was as though some horrid sight had been burned in upon them and she could not shut it out.

But she said nothing, only lay perfectly quiet with the burning eyes looking out from the white, drawn face. When the day had deepened into night, and night had again been merged into day, and still she had not slept, Cousin Priscilla hesitated no longer. Dr. Moore was called in. It was with ineffable satis-

faction that the good woman at last saw the tired eyelids close as the potent anodyne began to take effect. But it was days, even weeks before Christie was at all like her former self. She was not ill, she said, but she would sit silent for hours in the great easy-chair, with closed eyes and her head leaning back wearily. After a time this dull apathy was succeeded by a nervous excitability which gave her kind hostess almost equal anxiety. By degrees, however, youth and nature triumphed, and the bereaved girl roused herself again to take up the burden of life. How heavy it was no one but God and herself knew, for she uttered no word of complaint.

"Cousin Priscilla," she said, one day, "I must find some employment. I cannot longer live here a dependent on your bounty."

"Why, my child," returned the warm-hearted widow, "I have more than enough for both of us. I want you to feel that what is mine is yours as well."

"Thank you; you are as kind as possible, but, for that very reason, I feel that I cannot longer trespass upon your goodness. I think I will try to get some pupils in music."

"You may succeed in doing so, my dear, but I think it extremely doubtful. Our people are giving little or no attention to such things now, and small wonder."

"Then at least I can do plain sewing."

"And wear your life out, getting nothing for your labor."

"I must do something, Cousin Priscilla. Aside from the feeling that I have no right to burden you with my maintenance, is the necessity for constant employment, that I may have no time to brood over

the past. I must have something to take me out of myself."

"I wish I could persuade you to be contented as you are, Christie. The very morning you came I was wishing for a daughter, and lo, she was at my door and I did not know it. So it has always been with me. I have always had more than I deserved," and she raised her handkerchief to her eyes. Then she laid it in her lap and said, emphatically, "Say no more about leaving me, Christie. I won't allow it."

"But, Cousin Priscilla, don't you see that I must? I should lose my self-respect if I did not try to help myself. I am young and strong. You are a widow, who may, any day in these uncertain times, be thrown on the world with no resources but your own exhaustless energies. You are one of the most energetic women I ever knew, Cousin Priscilla. I think you will always be equal to the situation, whatever may come upon you, but that is no reason why I should sit supinely and let you take care of me."

"Well, I have unusually strong health, you know, and that of itself brings energy, though I believe I may lay claim to some small degree of industry." She was silent for some moments, during which she seemed to be thinking deeply. Then she said, "Since you will have it so, Christie, perhaps we had better hold a consultation as to ways and means. Two heads are better than one, especially when one of them is an old one like mine. What would you like best to do?"

"I have scarcely a preference, except that I want to lead a busy, active life—one that would give me as little time as possible for thought. This is my only objection to sewing. I am an expert needle-woman, and rather like the work, but my brain would be as

active as ever during the long hours when you are absent on your visits to the sick and wounded."

"There ! right there you have it, Christie. Nurses are badly needed for our poor boys, and surely that employment would make you utterly forget yourself, if anything could. And it is such noble work," she continued, with enthusiasm. "Your life would be one of such usefulness."

"I have thought of it, Cousin Priscilla. Indeed, that was my first choice, but I remembered dear grandmamma's prejudices, and felt that I had not the courage to run counter to them. I am so young, you know, and would be comparatively unprotected. Not that I fear for myself, understand—it is only that I wish still as religiously to respect her wishes as if she were living. Nay, I feel them even more binding upon me."

"I see," said Mrs. Marsh, musingly, "and perhaps, after all, I am not a suitable adviser for you in so grave a matter. My friends tell me that I often allow my feelings to run away with me. I know Mrs. Ball, the matron of the — hospital. Indeed, she is an old friend of mine, impoverished by this dreadful war. She assumed the position, partly as a means of livelihood, and partly from a sense of duty. Then, there is old Dr. Moore, who is one of the attending physicians. He has known the Roystons ever since he was born, and would not advise you to any course that your grandmother would have disapproved. But have you the nerve for such work, Christie?"

"I think so. I am perfectly healthy. I am sure I can force myself to any duty, however disagreeable, provided only that I feel it to be a duty."

The result was that within a few days she was

installed as nurse in one of the wards of the — hospital. Only light cases were at first given into her charge, but soon she proved herself to be so skillful, so eager to be of service, that she was allowed to look after even the most desperately wounded. Many a harrowing scene she witnessed, and, naturally, many of the duties connected with her office were trying to one delicately nurtured as she had been, but not once did she falter in the path she had chosen. There was to her an exquisite delight in the thought that she was still of use to some one in the world. And so time brought healing on his wings, and the wounds at first so sharp and deep were cicatrized so that no one suspected how much of the old pain was still there. Dr. Moore found in her one of his most trusted and valued assistants. Something of this he said to her one day.

"I have found my vocation, Doctor," she said, smiling up into the kind old face. "I would never have known what it was had not necessity forced me into this position."

"Ah, my dear, it is the willing mind that makes the vocation. You are quite as well fitted for many others as this. We can do anything if we only make up our minds to it."

"I believe you are right," she said thoughtfully; "not only do, but bear all things."

"Poor child, poor child," said the good physician, wiping his spectacles, as he looked after her a moment afterwards. "But why should I say that? If she has suffered, she has developed into such a woman as she would never otherwise have been. Life brings to each of us the discipline that we need."

When Christie had been in the hospital about a

year, Dr. Moore said to her one morning as she appeared on duty, "Miss Royston, we have two new cases to-day, one of which will require especial attention. I must tell you that he is a Federal officer. He is desperately wounded, and Gen. L., who was a class-mate of his at College, succeeded in having him brought here for treatment. Take care that you are not tempted to give him a dose of arsenic," he said mischievously, as he turned away.

She went at once into the ward where the sick men lay, and there, their cots standing side by side, she saw the pale, haggard faces of Felix Bradford and Carroll Massey. For a moment she was breathless with the surprise and thronging emotions that came over her. She felt herself trembling so much that she had to lean against the wall for support. Carroll was the first to see and recognize her. With a glad cry he called, "Christie, is it possible? How came you here?"

His companion had been lying with his eyes closed as if in sleep. Opening them wearily, he let them rest upon her. He said nothing, but the vacant expression gave place to one of pleasure as a wan smile played over the pallid face. She came quietly forward, and, standing between them, gave a hand to each. As she raised that of Carroll she observed that he winced a little.

"Oh, Carroll, forgive me,—did I give you pain? I should have been more thoughtful, but I was mindful only of the pleasure of seeing you again."

"No, no, you did not hurt me in the least. It was only the fear that you might. I have the other in a sling, you see."

"I see; I hope it is not seriously injured."

"No, I'll be all right again in a few weeks—so the surgeons tell me. But, Christie, what are you doing here?"

"Nursing those, who, like yourself, have had the ill-luck to get a limb broken, or otherwise to make themselves food for Yankee bullets." The words were no sooner spoken than she remembered how inconsiderate she had been. Turning to Felix Bradford, she said, smilingly, "And sometimes I take care of a stray Yankee, provided he is very good, and strictly obeys my orders."

"I promise to be very good," he said, in a faint voice, speaking now for the first time. "I throw myself on your mercy, Miss Royston. I know of what magnanimity you are capable."

"I have given you no cause to say that of me," she answered, her cheeks flushing hotly as she recalled the taunts she had flung at him that night at Malvern; "but I will try to merit your good opinion in the future."

"I will trust you fully," he said, still smiling, but his eyes closing wearily.

"But, Christie," urged Carroll, "this is no place for you. How came you to do it? How came you to be in Richmond at all?"

"Father desired me to come, thinking it might be safer for me than at Malvern. I needed employment and nurses were wanted at the hospital—ergo, I am here."

"You must give it up, Christie! You, so tenderly brought up, doing such work! It gives me the horrors to think of it. Where are your friends, that they allow so monstrous a sacrifice on your part?"

"It is no sacrifice, Carroll. Strange as you may

think it, my whole heart is in my work. And Dr. Moore says I'm one of his very best nurses," she added, with a little pardonable pride.

"That I can readily believe, but all the same, I don't like your being here. Don't you think it dreadful, General Bradford?"

"It is just what I should have expected of Miss Royston," he answered. "She seems to me peculiarly fitted for such a position. If she likes it, why not?"

"Ah, those are your Yankee notions," said Carroll, smiling. "I might have known better than to appeal to you. I had forgotten how very utilitarian you are. Then, too, it is not to be expected that you should feel for Christie as I do."

To this there was no reply. Christie noticed now that Felix Bradford's eyes were glittering, and there was a hectic flush on his cheeks. "I am like all boasters," she said, regretfully. "While I was extolling my own capabilities as a sick-nurse, I have talked one of my patients into a fever. You must be quiet, now."

There was little danger of disobedience to this command on the part of the patient to whom she had alluded. Felix Bradford had not strength to do otherwise than lie quietly, his whole being thrilled with a sense of her presence. Lying thus, with her near him, smiling upon him in that heavenly way, he would have obeyed the summons to cross the dark river without a tremor. There was no longer the proud scorn in her eyes that he had seen on that fateful night at Malvern. They were welling over with sympathy, deepest compassion, and he pleased himself with the thought that it might always be so.

"Before you go, Christie," said Carroll, "I must

tell you that we were wounded in the same battle—Bradford and I, he in one army, I in the other; he fighting for the Stars and Stripes, I for the Stars and Bars; yet here we lie together, with no enmity in our hearts, and you are the connecting link between us.”

“I am glad to know that,” she said. “It would pain me to feel that friends whom I so dearly prize should feel unkindly toward each other.” Felix Bradford heard her words as one in a dream. Again he smiled, a wan, but happy smile. “Friend,” he said to himself. “She called me her friend. Then she has forgiven my being in the Federal army.” This was the last thought floating hazily in his mind as he fell asleep.

Christie did what was necessary for their comfort and was moving on to another cot, when Carroll again spoke. “I feel that I cannot let you go, Christie, until you have told me something more of yourself; of all that has happened to you since I last saw you. Ah, how long it has been! More than three years, and in all that time I have not once seen my home or my mother.”

“Yes, I know,” she gently answered, “it has been very hard for you and for her as well. But I cannot tell you more now. Wait until you are stronger and I have more time. You must rest content with the knowledge that I am here, alive and well, and ready to take care of you.”

As she passed lightly from cot to cot, she saw that his eyes, bright and eager, followed her every movement. Now and then she would smile at him in a way that set his heart in a flutter. Felix Bradford still lay with closed eyes apparently asleep. When she returned to them she found that this was the case.

He had yielded to the influence of the anodyne Dr. Moore had administered.

"You should follow his example," she said, in a low tone to Carroll.

"I cannot, Christie, until I know everything. Do sit down here and tell me all about yourself."

Seeing that he would be contented with nothing less, she did so. He had already heard of Champney's fate as also of her grandmother's death, and she refrained from telling him of the painful events that had afterwards taken place until he should be stronger.

"My mother could tell me nothing," he said, "as all communication with our old home has been cut off. My anxiety concerning you has been unspeakable. And have you heard nothing from Connie?"

"Not a word. I have written to her uncle in New York to learn something of her whereabouts, but have had no reply. There is nothing singular in that, however, as it is questionable whether he has received one of my letters, or, if so, whether his own have not been lost. I try to hope for the best. I have great faith in Connie's ability to take care of herself. She is unusually self-reliant."

"Yes, she is. I wish all our women were so. I foresee the time when they can no longer be the clinging, dependent creatures so many of them now are." His brow darkened as he said the words. Christie knew of what he was thinking. Gradually but surely there was stealing a conviction into many hearts that the cause for which they had given up all was lost. But this thought was never spoken. It would have been deemed disloyalty to do so, not only by others but by the speakers themselves. Herein lay

one of the most potent factors of our defeat. When men lose heart all hope is gone.

Christie made no reply to this implied belief, but only said with a smile, "And yet you deprecate the idea of my depending upon my own exertions. See how inconsistent you are."

"Ah, but that is another thing. I objected more, please to remember, to the manner of your doing so. And besides," he added in a low tone after a glance at the sleeper opposite to make sure that he would be heard only by her, "I want to take care of you myself."

Her only reply was an equivocal smile which provoked and puzzled him in no small degree.

"Now, what may that mean, may I ask?" he said, smiling in return, but with a perplexed air.

"Oh, nothing, only I was thinking"—

"Well?"

"That you had never yet so distinguished yourself in the art of taking care of others, or even of yourself, that you should be so ready to assume charge of me."

A look of annoyance passed over his face. Then he brightened and said, "I believe my conduct in the past has given you a right to say that of me, Christie, but all that is over now. Only wait until the war ends and I'll show you what I can do. I have had time for reflection, and I hope it has not been lost upon me."

"We shall see what we shall see," said she, gaily.

"Ah, I see you have no faith in me."

"You mistake me, dear Carroll," she said, almost tenderly; "my faith in you is strong if only you will be true to yourself."

"Thank you for even so much," he replied, at the same time extending his hand to her.

Felix Bradford stirred uneasily and began to mutter to himself. Christie saw from his flushed face that his fever was increasing. She gently bathed his hands and face in cold water, and covered his head with moistened cloths.

"That's good, mother," he said. "Lay your hand on my head. Ah, how cool and soft it is."

He placed his own upon it and held it there, a trembling prisoner, while he rambled on of his boyish days when he had gone to his mother as a source of never-failing comfort. The tears came into Christie's eyes as she thought of that mother so far away from her only boy who was lying ill unto death in the hands of strangers—enemies, she, no doubt, would have considered them. Looking up, he saw them. "Don't cry," he said softly. "I am not worth it."

He slept fitfully, waking with a start now and then. "That's right, Jack," she heard him murmur. "You told me you'd take care of her. What, Fire-fly, my brave fellow, you are not afraid of your own shadow?" She knew that he was going over the events of that fearful night which now seemed to have been a century ago—or was it in some other world? Once he spoke out energetically: "I shall save you even if you hate me for it. Come, you must go." As the fever mounted higher to his brain, his utterances became more and more incoherent. Not once did he call her name. It was as though, for her sake, he kept a strong guard upon himself even in his delirious state. This was to her a great relief. Upon Dr. Moore's return he decided that he must be placed in a small room adjoining the ward of which Christie

had charge. The cot was taken up and quietly removed.

"Poor fellow," said Carroll, as he disappeared from view, "I fear there's not much chance for him. I saw the doctor's face when he examined his wounds. Christie, think! I might have died in that Northern prison, even as he's doing here now. Thank God! I was spared to come back to you, my darling." He caught her hand ere she was aware, and pressed it fervently to his lips.

"Hush, Carroll," she said, sternly, withdrawing it at once, while her face grew pallid to the lips. "I shall take care of you only on condition that you talk no more such nonsense. The first single time you transgress in that way I shall turn you over to another nurse, and I'll select the very oldest, and sourest, and ugliest I can find." She made a pitiful attempt to speak lightly as she uttered this threat.

"Why, Christie," he said, looking at her with astonished eyes, "I didn't mean to offend you. You haven't learned to hate me in these long, terrible years, have you?" His voice faltered, and his lips quivered like those of a grieved child.

"No, no, I could never do that. You are as dear to me as ever. Forgive me if I spoke harshly, but this is neither the time nor place for love-making. Think of the many eyes upon us here, even were there no other reason why you should refrain from anything of the sort."

"Christie, one question you must answer me." He clutched her arm and spoke in a suppressed whisper. "Do you still love that—that man in there?" pointing to Felix Bradford's room.

"Don't, Carroll, you hurt me," wrenching her arm from his grasp. "I don't know. I think not."

"Christie, you would never marry a Yankee?"

"Should I always remain in the same mind as now—no."

A look of relief stole into his face. "Oh, Christie, I had been hoping so much. I had made up my mind that just as soon as the war is over I would claim you as my wife."

"We'll talk of that when the time comes. For the present, let the subject rest. You have worn it threadbare. I see I'll have to carry my threat into execution. I'll call another nurse for you."

"No, no," catching her dress and detaining her. "I won't offend again, I promise you I will not. Only answer me this. You still love me a little, don't you?"

"Not only a little, but very much," she answered, smiling down affectionately upon him. "You are almost dearer to me than any one else in the world, now, Carroll."

"Almost, but not quite," he said, sadly. "Ah, well, I suppose I must be content with that."

"That's a very wise conclusion—one that you should have reached an hour ago. How quickly your pulse is beating! You have wrought yourself into fever. As a punishment, you shall take this powder Dr. Moore left for you."

He made a wry face but swallowed it without resistance. Ere long, he was quietly sleeping. Days followed in which he rapidly improved, and Felix Bradford lay hovering on the confines of another world. If Christie had been self-deceived as to the nature of her regard for him, she now fully realized

her mistake. With what alternations of hope and despair she watched his struggle for life against the power that threatened to overcome him. He was rarely conscious, but sometimes he would look into her face with a smile that would set her heart to beating with a tremulous joy. One day, during a lucid interval of unusual length, he caused his watch and other valuables to be placed in her keeping, and charged her with messages for his mother and sister. "And this ring," he said, "I would be glad if you would keep for yourself as a trifling souvenir of our friendship. We are good friends now, are we not, Christie?"

"Yes, yes," she answered, "but you are not going to die, General Bradford. You are so young. I feel sure you have yet a long and useful life before you."

She spoke with a confidence she was far from feeling, but her words seemed to soothe him. He looked yearningly into her eyes. Something he read there that brought a happy light into his wasted face. "I hope you may be right," he said, with a smile, still looking into the speaking eyes. "Life is very sweet to me, Christie."

Nothing more was said, and soon he had fallen into the most quiet, refreshing slumber that had yet come to him. Carroll Massey rather jealously watched this little scene. He was not now regularly confined to his bed, and would be with them only a few days longer, as arrangements were being made for him to go to his mother on sick leave of absence.

The thought of leaving Christie with the man whom he had again come to consider his rival was not a pleasant one, but there was nothing small in his nature, and his sympathies had been aroused to the

utmost by General Bradford's patient sufferings. "I fear I must at last give her up," he sighed to himself. "I know that her first and best love can never be mine, but, poor child, that is not her fault. After all, the half of Christie's heart is worth more than the whole of any other woman's," was his consoling reflection. When the time for his departure came, General Bradford was much better, and was pronounced by Dr. Moore to be in a fair way of recovery. Christie's bright face now confirmed his previous forebodings. For more reasons than one, he did not like to leave her there.

As they were sitting together in the little reception room of the hospital, he said to her, "Christie, come, go home with me. I cannot bear to leave you here. Go with me to my mother. She will gladly welcome you."

"I cannot, Carroll. If I wouldn't accept a home with Cousin Priscilla, surely I couldn't with your mother."

"Then go as her daughter, Christie,—as my wife," said he, eagerly.

"I thought we had done with that business for the present, Carroll," she said, attempting to speak lightly. "You take advantage of your release from thralldom. I cannot threaten you now as when you were so wholly in my power."

"I wish I could induce you to grant my request, Christie," he said, wistfully.

She had not forgotten her promise to her father. She felt that at some time in the future she must redeem it, but she could not bring herself to do so now. "You forget, Carroll," she said, gently, "that I may be only an additional burden to you. We are

all more or less impoverished now. You and Allan will have much ado to sustain your mother's family."

"You could never be a burden, Christie."

"You think so now, but it's only because you have never known want. I think, with you, that the end is near. Until then, it's best for me to remain in my present position. I can be most useful here."

"Christie," he burst out, "you stay only to be near Felix Bradford." The next moment he would have given worlds to be able to recall the rash words.

She looked at him, her eyes filled with a scornful reproach. She spoke in icy tones that chilled his heart. "I had thought better of you, Carroll. Good-by. I must return to my post."

He caught her hand and held it tightly in both his own. "Christie, forgive me. Don't leave me in this way. That suspicion was unworthy of me, and an insult to you. You must allow something for a jealous lover's pangs."

She was silent.

"Then I must give up all hope, Christie?"

She was touched by the appealing words. "I didn't say that, Carroll," she answered, gently. "When the end comes, we'll see what can be done," and with this vague promise he was forced to be content.

"Surely, surely, my father cannot blame me for not yielding to his wishes now," she said to herself, as she went sadly back to her work. Yet all that day and for many days after there was a weary, troubled look upon her face which it irked the soul of Felix Bradford to see. "Could I have been mistaken, after all?" he questioned within himself. "Is it Carroll Massey that she loves?" He said no word of love to

her. He felt that it would be taking an unfair advantage of their present position toward each other. She was kindness itself, constantly supplying him with books and other means of amusement, but there was a certain shyness in her manner that raised an insurmountable barrier between them.

Had he been better versed in the secrets of the female heart, he would have known what this betokened. As it was, it caused him many hours of uneasiness. Still, he gradually grew stronger, until he was able, with the assistance of crutches, to walk about the house and even occasionally in the grounds attached to it. One day he startled her by saying, "I will be leaving you to-morrow, Miss Royston. I don't know if you have been told that, for some days, arrangements have been pending for an exchange of prisoners. Through the kindness of my friend, Gen. L., I am among the favored ones."

Christie felt the blood receding from her face, but she forced a smile and compelled herself to say, as lightly as possible, "Then I hope we'll get an able-bodied soldier in your place. You'll be worth little to your country for some time, I fancy."

"No, I will not be fit for duty for some months to come—perhaps not until my services are no longer needed. I almost wish it might be so, Miss Royston. I am sick unto death of war and bloodshed."

"And so am I. But we'll fight you to the last," she said, looking at him defiantly.

He laughed. "I can well believe that. You women are the worst rebels of all. I am inclined to think you'll take up arms against us when your men lay them down."

"We'd like to," she answered.

"Christie, he said, presently, "you have again brought me in your debt. We are no longer quits. You have saved my life a second time, for Dr. Moore says, and I feel, that but for your skillful nursing I would have been vanquished by my enemy. I had almost succumbed when I saw you standing, like an angel of hope, before me."

"You remind me, General Bradford, that I have not yet repaid you the amount you advanced to me—that night. I regret that I have only Confederate money, which will be worthless to you after you leave us. What shall I do about it?"

"Pray don't give it a moment's thought," he said, his cheeks flushing painfully. "I thought you would have spared me this, Christie. What are those few paltry dollars in comparison with what you have done for me?"

"I did only my duty."

"Aye, and I begin to think purely from a sense of duty. I had allowed myself to hope that you had put aside the recollection that I am a so-called enemy—one of your hated 'Yankees'—that you saw in me only the friend of the olden time."

"I have thought—do think of you as a friend," she answered, in a low tone, "and as the preserver of my life—my rescuer from a horrible fate. I wouldn't thank you then; I do so now."

"Then you wish still to live?"

"Yes; I have learned that however lonely or desolate we may be, there's still always something for us to do, if only we will set ourselves to work to find it. I am very grateful to have been of some use here. But, come, we haven't yet settled the debt question. Will you take my poor, shabby Confederate notes?"

He hesitated a moment, then reached out his hand for them. "Yes, I'll take them. One day, I shall restore them to you with interest,"—this with a smile so peculiar that she could not fathom its meaning.

"I shall make it my first business to find Mrs. Constance and send you tidings of her," he said as he was bidding her good-by.

"Thank you ; you are very kind. But be careful not to exert yourself beyond your strength."

When he was gone, Christie felt her life a blank. For some days she went about her tasks so silently that Dr. Moore jestingly asked her if she had not yet sufficiently repented having allowed the "Yankee" to slip through her fingers—that she had not administered the dose of arsenic he had advised.

"I am in sack-cloth and ashes," was her smiling reply, leaving the good doctor to ponder upon the double meaning that might be hidden in her words.

"I don't like the looks of things," he muttered, slowly and doubtfully shaking his head as she moved away. "She's too grand a woman to throw away her heart upon a Yankee. This one was an unusually fine specimen of the race—I must admit that ; but he's not good enough for her—nor is any one else I know, when it comes to that."

CHAPTER XII.

A YOUNG HERO.

ONE day, Mrs. Marsh bustled into the — hospital on one of her numerous visits. There was an unusual brightness in her eyes and a more than ordinary energy and quickness of movement as, without waiting to be announced, she began a search for her cousin.

"Christie," she said almost breathlessly, as soon as she had caught sight of her, "I came to tell you that in my rounds, this morning, I stumbled upon a drummer-boy, badly wounded, who, upon inquiry, I found to be one John Royston from Santa Rita, Texas. I am confident this is a son of poor Lewis." Cousin Priscilla had always persisted in applying this adjective to her relative since his removal to Texas. He might as well be in Siberia, she was wont to say. "He seemed so ill that I didn't like to question him personally, but if I am not mistaken, this is the Jack I have heard you speak of so often. If so, he must be removed to my house at once, for he is not at all comfortable where he is."

"No, Cousin Priscilla, he must come here. No one but myself must nurse him. But how can it be Jack? He is not in the army; he's too young."

"This is a mere lad—not more than sixteen, I should say. How long before you are again on duty?"

"Not for an hour yet."

"Then come with me. My carriage is at the door. We will settle the question at once."

Dr. Moore was persuaded to go with them, that he might decide whether the patient could be removed without risk. When Christie entered the room of the youthful soldier, he was asleep. A moment's glance was sufficient to convince her that he was really Jack. But how different from the rosy, moon-faced boy she had known! His face was thin and almost colorless, the cheek-bones painfully prominent, and there were dark circles under the sunken eyes, while the blue-veined lids were almost transparent. The tawny hair was closely shorn, and altogether there was something so pathetic in his appearance that Christie turned away, and, burying her face in her hands, gave way to an emotion now very unusual with her.

"Come, come, Miss Royston, this will never do," said Dr. Moore, gently. "You mustn't give way. All your strength will be needed for nursing him."

As he spoke he was furtively wiping his own glasses, which had unaccountably grown dim. Cousin Priscilla retired to the hall and had a good, comfortable cry. "So young," she murmured, "and so far from home."

"Doctor," said Christie, "he must be taken to the hospital at once, or I must leave my patients there and come to him. Will there be danger in removing him?"

"No, I think not; at any rate, the injury that may be done him will be more than counterbalanced by the advantage of having you as nurse. I don't like his present surroundings, and as for your coming here, I can't spare you from the hospital. You must go

back and have the Yankee general's room prepared for him. Have no uneasiness as to his removal. I will give it my personal supervision."

"Oh, thank you, Doctor. How kind you are."

"Not a bit of it, not a bit of it. But go now and make ready for him."

Jack had been comfortably established in his new quarters and had again fallen asleep under the influence of a narcotic before his cousin was admitted to his presence, as it was feared that the excitement of seeing her just then might prove too much for his sadly diminished strength. She stopped Dr. Moore on his way from the sick boy's room.

"Oh, Doctor, please tell me, is he so dangerously wounded?"

"I will not conceal the truth from you, Miss Royston. It is a bad case. The ball passed entirely through his body and left arm. One thing is in his favor. I learn that he had just recovered from an illness which had so reduced him in flesh that the danger from fever is lessened. At the same time, however, his vitality must have been more or less exhausted by the disease. But don't be cast down. We may be able to pull him through yet. You and I have managed as tough cases as his. It all depends upon his natural vigor of constitution."

"Then there is hope. He is strong as an ox—had never been ill a day in his life when I saw him last. That was four years ago."

"That is cheering news. Well, well, I'll physic him and you'll nurse him, and between the two of us we will see what we can do. We have outwitted death more than once when he was just ready to spring upon *his* prey. There, there, have done with that crying

now. That will never do in the world. Go bathe your face, and when he sees you, let it wear as cheerful an aspect as possible."

She obeyed orders, and went into the room of her patient, whom she found to be still sleeping. At sight of the worn, pallid face, the tears again came into her eyes, but she forced herself to calmness and sat down near him quietly, to watch for his waking. After a time, he stirred a little, and made a pitiful attempt to go through the motion of beating a drum with his uninjured hand. "Hurrah!" he cried, "we've whipped 'em! Don't you see 'em? There they go, a-runnin' jest like a lot o' skeered turkeys!" Christie could not forbear a smile at these words, so characteristic of the Jack of old. Just then he opened his eyes and looked at her for some moments in a dazed, bewildered way. Then he feebly put up his poor, attenuated hand and touched her.

"Christie," he whispered, "is it you or your ghost?"

"Do I look like a ghost, Jack?" stooping and kissing his forehead.

"No, you don't, and that didn't feel like a ghost's kiss, either. Do it ag'in, Christie."

She kissed him, not once, but several times, and softly stroked his hair. "There!" she said, "be quiet now. I am here to nurse you well again. I'll soon have some color in these pale cheeks."

"Yes, 'twont be long before I'm beatin' my drum ag'in. Christie," he went on presently, "you don't think I'm goin' to die, do you?"

"I—oh, no, I hope not, Jack."

"That means you're afraid there's some danger. I heard them doctors whisperin' about it when they

thought I was asleep. But, Christie, don't you be one bit uneasy. I'm not goin' to die—I'm determined I won't. I'm goin' back to Texas and to Violet."

"To be sure you will. Only keep up that spirit and you'll be sure to get well."

"I tell you I ain't got no notion o' dyin', Chris. I'd be a pretty simpleton to go an' do such a thing now just when my life's beginnin', wouldn't I?"

"I think so."

"Of course I would. Now you jest rest easy, old lady. I'll be up from here in less'n no time," and, indeed, his recovery was remarkably rapid,—marvelous in Dr. Moore's eyes.

"That boy will make his mark in the world, Miss Royston, now you mind what I tell you," he said to Christie one day, as he encountered her in one of the halls. "Such force of will I have rarely seen, especially in one so young. That alone has saved his life. Even your skillful nursing would have availed nothing had he lost hope. If we had an army of such men we would never know the meaning of the word defeat."

"Your enthusiastic praise is very pleasant to hear," she said, with brimming eyes. "Jack is an especial favorite of mine. We were sworn comrades while I was in Texas."

"His being a Texan accounts for everything. I have never seen such a set of devil-may-care fellows as they all are. They seem to have as many lives as a cat."

When Christie returned to Jack, she said, smilingly, "I have the very best news for you, old fellow. The doctor now pronounces you entirely out of danger.

He says you'll be able to sit up a little in a few days."

He received this intelligence with an imperturbability that rather surprised her notwithstanding his constant assertion that he would get well. "That's no news to me, Christie. I've known all the time that I wouldn't die."

"And most fortunate for you was it that you felt so, otherwise you might have died."

"Is that so? Why it seemed to me just the easiest thing in the world to live."

"But now come, my boy," taking his hand and gently caressing it, "you haven't yet told me how you came to be in this sorry plight. Until I saw you, that day, I thought you were safe in Texas."

His pale face flushed a little. "I reckon I may as well out with the truth at once, Christie, for you'll be sure to drag it out o' me before you're done. There's no gettin' roun' you, I know of old. Well, I run away to the army."

He said the words bravely, but he did not dare to look into her face for fear of the sorrowful reproach he felt sure he would find in her eyes. He was relieved when she only said very quietly, "Indeed! how did you come to do such a thing?"

"Violet laughed at me and called me a coward, one day, an' I concluded I'd show her whether I was or not."

"And what did Uncle Lewis say?"

"Oh, father an' mother was dreadful cut up about it at first, but I wrote to 'em an' told 'em all about how it was, an' they've done forgive me now. You see, I come on here to Capt. Linton's company. Max was with him an' a lot o' fellers besides 'at I knowed.

An', oh, Christic, you'd never b'lieve whut a splendid soldier Tobe Hawkins is made. He fights like a tiger —ain't afraid o' nothin' in the worl'. Ever sence that day the Don knocked him down he's been a-gittin' mo' sense inter his noddle. He told me, t'other day, 'at he useter be the bigges' fool in all Texas. When a man fin's that out fur hisself there's some hope of him —don't you think so?"

"Yes, and I'm glad to hear so good an account of him; but I observe that in your excitement you are lapsing into those inelegancies of speech that used to annoy me so much. Now that you are getting well so fast I shall take upon myself the task of calling your attention to these things."

"All right; but I had learned to talk as proper as anybody, mighty near, until I come off into the army. The men was all so keerless I got so, too."

"The men was all so keerless," she said, laughingly mimicking him.

"Were all so careless, then," strongly emphasizing the "care."

"Very well; that's better. Now tell me how you managed to get to Virginia. Did you have plenty of money to pay your way?"

"Nary a red. I spent the last cent I had gettin' a book for Violet I heard her say she wanted. No, I had to beg my way, mos'ly. I had a pretty tough time of it, I tell you. I wouldn't a-begged for nothin' else, but I told everybody I was runnin' away to the army. I sold my clothes along, an' got a pretty good price for 'em, too, for clothes is clothes now, you know, Chris. When I got to Capt. Linton's company, I was such a ragged scarecrow none of 'em hardly didn' know me, but it happened they'd just captured a lot

o' things from the Yankees, an' they found some clothes amongst 'em small enough for me—that is, mighty near; they wa'n't a very tight fit, an' Violet would a-laughed at 'em, I reckon, if she could a-seen me. I had to wear that Yankee uniform for a few days, an' I didn't like it a bit, but it was that or nothin', an' the weather was sorter frosty."

"And Violet? Have you heard nothing from her?"

"Yes, indeedy. If you'll just have my haversack brought to me, I'll show you a note I got from her. It's in there along with her picture. I stole that picture, Chris, the night I run away. Was that wrong, do you think?"

"Don't ask me. I can't be your conscience-keeper," she said, laughing at his wistful face. "Come, here's the haversack."

His hands trembled with eagerness as he searched its depths for the precious picture. At last a daguerreotype was produced from among its medley of contents. "It ain't half as pretty as she is," he said, as he gazed long and earnestly at it. Then he removed it from its case, and a soiled, crumpled note was revealed, which he handed to his cousin to read.

"Dear Jack," it ran, "I am so sorry I said to you what I did. I'm afraid that's what made you run away, and if you get killed, I'll never forgive myself. Please come back home and leave it to others to fight those horrid Yankees. Your friend,

"VIOLET ROY."

"Well, whut do you think of it, Christie?" asked Jack, when she had finished it. There was a note of triumph in his tones.

"I think it's a very nice little note."

"I should say so—especially comin' from her. You've no idea what a proud little thing she is. But she likes me fur all her high an' mighty ways. Never mind. I'll make her take back all the ugly things she said about my red head and freckled face yet. I'll make her say I'm the handsomest man in the Confederate States—see if I don't. I'll—I'll make her say the moon's made o' green cheese if I want her to."

"There, there! don't get so excited over it, if you please. I perceive you've been reading Shakespeare."

"Yes, I've read a whole lot sence I seen you. Judge Roy said I was gettin' along finely. I hated dreadful to give up my school, but I'll make up for it when we've whipped out these Yankees."

"Oh, Jack, I think you should return home when you get well. Don't go back to the army."

He shook his head. "I ought never to a-come, that's the truth, Christie, but now that I've done it, I'll fight it out," and all her persuasions could not change his resolution.

During these days of convalescence, it was the chief pleasure of Cousin Priscilla's life to concoct dainty dishes to tempt the young invalid's appetite; not that much effort was needed for this, for, after the first few days, he would seize ravenously upon anything eatable that was placed before him. As he laughingly expressed it, "all was grist that came to his mill." One day Christie surprised him in the act of concealing something under the bed-clothes.

"What are you hiding there, Jack? Out with it, old man."

"'Tain't nothin' 'tall you keer anything about, Christie," he said, confusedly.

"Come, hand it here. I can allow no such surreptitious proceedings," she answered, beginning to institute a search for the hidden article.

"Whew! whut a jaw-breaker, Christie! Whut does it mean! Go bring me the dictionary, will you? Surrip—surruf—s-u-r—whut in thunder was it, Chris?"

"Never mind what it was. You know the meaning of the word well enough. Tell me what it is you have hidden there. For aught I know Cousin Priscilla may have brought you a mince-pie in my absence. She is quite capable of it so great is her infatuation about you."

"Now, you sha'n't abuse poor Cousin Priscilla so. She's just an angel in black silk, that's whut she is. When the war's over I'm goin' to give her a bran new one. Do you know, Christie, that one she wears is patched an' darned tel you ca' hardly see the silk for the patches? Poor, dear old lady. She's a heap better to me'n you are, Miss."

Christie paid no heed to this gallant remark, but mercilessly continued her search and finally drew out a worn copy of Cicero and a pocket Latin dictionary. Jack flushed to his finger tips.

"Well, Miss Curiosity, I hope you're satisfied now. A feller can't even pursue literature a little but whut you pounce upon him like a hawk on a chicken."

"Where did you get these books, Jack?"

"Where do you reckon? I fetched 'em all the way from Santa Rita, of course. When I let everything else go I held on to them and I managed to study a little whenever I could steal the chance. Give 'em

to me, Christie, please. I was right in the middle of an oration an' the ole feller'd got sorter tangled up an' I want to see how he comes out. Or, maybe, it was me got tangled up for this dictionary ain't the best in the world. I can't always find the word I'm lookin' for, an' then I have to put in one o' my own."

"Are you sure you are equal to it, Jack?"

"I've been doin' it every chance I had ever sence that day you had my haversack brought in, an' I reckon 'twon't hurt me no more to-day than it's been doin' all the time. Cicero was a grand old feller, wa'n't he, Christie?"

"I don't know about that. It seems to me that he was very vain, and we know that he was a political turn-coat. Besides"—

"That's enough, Chris. Don't put me out o' conceit with him, please. I think it was awful the way he died, don't you?"

"Yes, those were terrible times. Scarcely a man of prominence was allowed to die a natural death."

"Worse'n in our own day, wa'n't it?"

"Yes, though ours are bad enough. However, I hope, I must hope, for better soon."

True to his determination, Jack returned to his command as soon as he had been pronounced strong enough to do so, but he had not long to remain with it. The end of the struggle which, on the part of the Confederates, had grown so desperate, was near. Ere long that last sad farewell of their idolized chieftain to his war-worn veterans would be spoken. With reverently-bowed heads they would pass before him, each giving a tender, solemn, lingering look into the noble face which misfortune now rendered almost

sacred in their eyes,—eyes which “all unused to weep” are dimmed with tears which come from hearts ready to burst with grief. And Jack, feeling that for him the end of life had come, with “the muffled drum’s sad roll” would “beat the soldier’s last tattoo.” And so, ragged, hungry, weary, heart-broken, they would disperse to their distant homes, caring for little now that the cause for which they had so long fought was lost; nay, envious even of those for whom “their haughty banner trailed in dust, was now their martial shroud.”

But courage, Jack. Courage, brave men. All is not yet lost. There still remain to you a country and a name. One day you will learn to look upon the old flag, not with hatred nor yet with indifference, but with much of the pride and love of the olden time. The Southern Cross will be tearfully, reverently laid away nevermore to be unfurled; a hallowed relic of the past; a sacred reminder of those who fell fighting beneath its folds. Its memory, like that of our dead heroes, will be kept fresh and green in our hearts even while we join heartily in the cry, “God bless our country,—North, East, South and West—now again and forever ONE!”

In the parlor of a certain home in Santa Rita, sits a little lady whose tear-stained face betokens some sad grief. Nay, as we look upon her, our own hearts are touched with sympathy and longing to breathe consolation into her ear. Her arms are resting on the broad window-sill and the curly head is laid upon them. No tears are falling now; it would seem that their fountain had been exhausted; but the sweet mouth quivers, and now and then a shuddering sob

steals over the delicate frame. In her lap lies a book in a gorgeous cover of crimson and gold. She has not been reading it, only pressing it, now to her face, and again to her heart, unmindful of the tears that fell upon it, sadly marring its beauty. Outside the flowers are blooming, the birds are singing, and the soft breezes playing wantonly with the vines about her window, but all this brightness seems to her but a mockery, for she has just been told that Jack, her good friend, Jack Royston—she will not call him more even to herself, is dead. And she it was who sent him to his fate, she says to herself, over and over again. But for her, he would be here, alive and well to-day. How can she bear it? She is so young and she knows she will live to be an old, old woman, always bearing about with her this terrible weight of crime. And she will be so lonely without Jack. She had no idea she would miss him so. She has no one now to tease, and life is a weariness generally. At last, exhausted with grief, she falls asleep, but still the piteous sobs and moans are occasionally heard. Even yet, her sorrow is not forgotten.

She does not hear the door softly opened, nor the tramp of feet across the floor. She stirs uneasily, however, as a bronzed youth in a tattered gray uniform stands gazing wonderingly at the pretty face which he has seen only wreathed in smiles or lighted up with mocking laughter, now looking so woful and sad. A tender pity fills his heart. He longs to take her into his arms and soothe her grief, or to "whip the feller that had been hurtin' her feelin's," but he dares only to touch her gently on the arm.

"Violet!"

She starts, and looks up. Surely that was Jack's

voice, or had she only dreamed that it was he? Another moment, and her arms are clinging tightly about his neck, and the curly head is nestling on his shoulder.

"Oh, Jack, Jack, they told me you were dead, and I thought I had murdered you. Ah, I'm so glad you've come back. I'll be so good. I'll never tease you again. Dear Jack, why don't you say something to let me know it is really you, and not your ghost?"

Truth to tell, Jack was afraid to speak, lest he might break the spell that seemed to be upon them. Could it be true? Was this Violet—this tearful, clinging creature, the haughty, disdainful Violet? Ah, it was worth having gone to the wars a thousand times over. He caught up one of the dainty little hands in his own great, rough "paws," as he was accustomed to call them, and pressed it tenderly to his lips.

"Violet! my darling!" he whispered, "is it true that you do love me, after all?"

"What is the meaning of all this, may I ask?" said a voice behind them.

Violet raised her head but did not let go her hold upon her newly-recovered treasure. "Oh, mamma, only think! Here is Jack come back, and he's not dead at all. Oh, I'm so glad," and down went the little head again to its former resting-place. She would like to lie there forever, she thought.

"Well, my dear, I am sure he didn't expect such a boisterous welcome from you. There, there, I think you've fully convinced him of your delight now."

For the first time she realized what she had done. Instantly she removed her arms from his neck, and, blushing crimson, turned away. "I beg your pardon,

Jack. I—I—I had been asleep, I believe. Pray excuse me."

Strange to say, Jack was now boldness itself. He did not in the least feel the awkwardness of the situation.

"Sit down, Jack," said Mrs. Roy, kindly. "I am very glad to see you."

"And I to see you, madam, but I will say to you candidly that I could have waited a few minutes longer for the pleasure."

"You naughty boy! See what comes of being a soldier. You would never have dared to make that speech to me before you went away. It's well I came in just when I did, else I don't know to what lengths Violet's heroics might have led her. She might have been regularly making love to you. Violet! Violet!" but Violet had disappeared, nor did Jack again see her that day.

CHAPTER XIII.

YANKEE OR REBEL—WHICH?

WHEN Richmond fell into the hands of the Federals, Mrs. Marsh persuaded Christie to go with her to a small town in a distant county near which she owned a plantation. It was at some distance from a railway, and was one of the very few portions of the State that had not suffered from the occupancy of an army. Dr. Moore had approved of their course, and they had left the city hurriedly, apprising very few friends of their destination. These few were almost all refugees from their homes whither they now returned to "gather up the fragments" that might remain to them. Dr. Moore had also left Richmond shortly after their departure.

Thus it chanced that some months had passed, and still Christie and her father were in ignorance of each other's existence. No tidings had reached her of Champney or Constance, and she dreaded unspeakably to return to the old plantation where she had no longer a home. She knew that she must do this sooner or later. Aside from the terrible associations connected with it, she hesitated again to meet Carroll. That promise to her father began to weigh heavily upon her now that she had time to brood over the past. So far as her own future was concerned, she felt how cheerless it would be, left all alone as she was, and was it not possible that she might in time bring herself to give to Carroll that wifely devotion which he had so richly deserved

at her hands? Cousin Priscilla had more than once congratulated her that so happy a life awaited her. Almost she had come to regard it as her fate that she should become Carroll's wife, but still she shrank unaccountably from it.

"Do you think you can go with me to Malvern, next week, Cousin Priscilla," she asked, one day. "It's time I should see what can be done with the land. I don't know if any of the negroes are still there, but, perhaps, I may be able to have at least a portion of it cultivated. And then, there is the silver, besides some other valuables, in the cave."

"Do you suppose they have remained unmolested?"

"I can't tell. They may have been accidentally discovered, but I am now the only living person that knows of their concealment."

"Do you think you can bear to go back, Christie?"

A spasm of pain contracted her features. "I must Cousin Priscilla. It isn't a question of choice. I must do something to maintain myself."

"Carroll won't let that be for long, my dear," she returned, smiling affectionately upon her. "For the present, I wish you would be contented to remain with me. I scarcely see how I can live without you now. You have spoiled me for the lonely life that I must lead," and she passed her hand caressingly over the brown hair.

"I am very glad that I have been a comfort to you, Cousin Priscilla. Nothing I can do will ever repay you for what you did for me. I was homeless and you took me in—ready to die from utter weariness of life, and you taught me that in ministering to the wants of others was to be found the only earthly panacea for the heart-sickness from which I suffered."

"Nonsense, my dear. I did nothing of the sort. You did it yourself."

"As you please, but I shall always have my own way of thinking about it, nevertheless."

That afternoon, summoning Rosalie, a little negro girl who usually accompanied her in her walks, she set forth for "The Spring," a gurgling, mossy fountain gleaming like a jewel in the bosom of a shady dell about a mile from the town. It was a favorite haunt with her. In it she could have the seclusion she coveted for quiet thought, and yet be sufficiently near the highway to feel a sense of protection. From its leafy covert she could look out upon the passers-by, herself entirely concealed from view. On reaching it, she seated herself upon a boulder which seemed especially designed for the purpose. It was covered with gray lichens, and in the side furthest removed from the road was a semi-circular opening, around which ran a sort of shelf or bench just a convenient height from the ground. Above this, the smooth rock rose several feet, making a pleasant rest for her head, as, removing her hat, she leaned back wearily. There was no glimpse of the highway from her present position—only of the laughing little fountain and the dell beyond. The ground was strewn with parti-colored leaves, and in the trees overhead the sad autumn winds were sighing.

Rosalie busied herself in gathering the leaves and pinning them together with pine-needles, singing and merrily chattering to herself the while. After decorating Christie's hat with a gorgeous chaplet, she proceeded to adorn herself with others, wreathing them about her head, neck, wrists, and waist. Nay, her dress of coarse white cotton was at last almost entirely

concealed by the splendid robe she had manufactured for herself. Now and then she would go to the spring as to a mirror to note the effect of her efforts. This was eminently satisfactory, and her innocently-spoken admiration of her charms brought an amused smile to Christie's face.

"Now, den, Rosie, yer'll sorter do. Yer's er wight good-lookin' nigger wid all dem fine fixin's on yer. Dat crown make yer look like er queen, sho' 'nuff."

Growing tired at last of watching the little creature's antics, Christie said to her, "I shall depend upon you, Rosie, to see that no 'boogars' catch us," and, closing her eyes, she abandoned herself to thought. "It is time I was looking my future squarely in the face," she said to herself. "I must—but how perplexing it is. If I don't marry Carroll my conscience will give me no rest for having broken my promise to poor father. If I do marry him, then I am equally certain of its reproaches for having done so when my best love was not his. The only way out of the difficulty that I can see is just to tell him frankly how I feel about the matter. Should he still persist, then the consequences must be upon his own head." Then other tormenting questions would arise.

"Even in that case, would I not be sinning against God and myself?" she continued, and again she went back to the beginning and tried to reason it all out clearly. Her brain began to whirl. "Have I then lost the power of discrimination between right and wrong?" she asked herself. Then she lay still for a time trying not to think. The effort was a vain one, however, and presently she found her thoughts wandering around the same never-ending circle. "To be

or not to be—that's the question," she said aloud at last, sighing wearily.

"If you will allow me to decide for you, I should say to be, undoubtedly," said a voice overhead, and, looking up, she saw the smiling face of Carroll Massey above her. A moment later, that of Felix Bradford peered over his shoulder. "I hope you were not contemplating suicide, Christie," continued the former. "If so, then we came not a moment too soon."

She stood up, smiling vacantly, waiting to receive them as they scrambled down from the rock. It seemed nothing out of the ordinary course of things that they should be there. She had been thinking of each so intensely it was as though her own spirit had summoned theirs to her presence.

"We came upon you too suddenly," said Felix Bradford, as he felt how cold was the hand she gave him and saw that she was trembling. "I fear we startled you."

"No—yes—I believe you did a little. How came you here?"

"Mrs. Marsh told us where you were, and we were too impatient to see you to wait for your return," answered Carroll. "We had no intention of making our advent so suddenly, however—that was purely accidental."

"Have you been—home, Carroll?" she asked as they started homeward.

"Not yet. My mother will return soon. I was in Richmond, and Bradford and I, chancing to stumble upon each other in our search for you, concluded to run down here together. A nice way for you to serve your friends, Christie—running away and hiding yourself, leaving no clue to your whereabouts."

"I didn't mean to do that. I thought Dr. Moore could give the necessary information to any one who might care to know."

"He has left Richmond and buried himself, nobody knows where. We have found you at last, however, and we don't mean to lose sight of you again ; you may rest assured of that."

"Who gave you the clue to my hiding place , as you choose to call it ?" she asked.

Carroll rattled on, seeming not to hear her. "All the world seems changed, Christie. Everything is upside down generally. I am in a constant daze—scarcely know who or what I am. Isn't it odd, for instance, that Bradford and I should be walking peacefully here together, when, only a few months ago, we were ready to take each other's lives ?"

She turned to that gentleman suddenly, "General Bradford," she said, almost breathlessly, "you come to give me news of Constance. That is what brings you here. Where—how is she ?" In her excitement she had laid her hand upon his arm, but suddenly bethinking herself, removed it. She did not dare to ask after Champney. She had no longer a hope that he might be living.

"Yes, Miss Royston," he answered, quietly, "I am glad to be able to tell you that she is alive and well. She will soon return to Oakwood, and expects you to share her home with her."

"Dear Connie," she said, the tears welling into her eyes ; "how glad I shall be to see her again. I am not, then, entirely alone in the world."

Her companions exchanged a meaning glance, but she did not see them.

"You have seen her ?" she asked, eagerly.

"Yes, and I never saw her looking better. Our Northern climate has done wonders for her. She is as fresh and blooming as the day she was a bride."

"How cruel of him," thought Christie. "Why need he allude to that event, when he must know that the thought of it can only give me pain?" "You have letters for me from her?"

"No; she thought it unnecessary to write, as she would see you so soon."

"Surely she might have written," she said, with a suggestion of reproach in her tones. "She must know how I am hungering for a line from her. But tell me, Carroll," suddenly changing the subject, "of your mother and sisters."

"They are quite well, and eagerly looking forward to the time when we shall all meet at Cloverdale."

"And Allan?"

A shadow crossed his face. "He has entirely recovered. He lost a leg, you know, in one of the last battles of the war."

"No, I did not know. Oh, poor Allan! How does he bear it?"

"Bravely; better, indeed, than my mother and Gertie. However, they consider themselves very fortunate in having us both escape with our lives."

They talked on of their old friends, giving mutual information, until Christie remembered how all this must make Felix Bradford feel himself a stranger and an alien—almost an enemy still. Glancing toward him, she saw that he seemed in deep thought; indeed, his silence and abstraction almost bordered upon moodiness.

"Pray pardon our thoughtlessness, General Bradford," she said. "In our anxiety to hear of and from

friends from whom we have been so long separated, we forgot that you couldn't be equally interested in their fates."

"That was only natural," he answered, smiling kindly upon her. "Pray continue your conversation without a thought of me."

She saw that he meant what he said, and so they talked on without restraint, he occasionally giving utterance to a pleasant remark. As they approached her temporary home, they saw Cousin Priscilla standing on the front portico, fanning herself so vigorously as to set all her cap-ribbons in a violent flutter, although the day was cool even to chilliness, now that the sun was so low. Christie knew from experience that this betokened an unusual state of excitement. Could she be angry because the Yankee General, as she always called Felix Bradford, had presumed to visit her relative at her home? Surely that could not be, since her favorite, Carroll Massey, had been responsible for his presence, and she knew of the past friendship existing between him and Champney. But Cousin Priscilla's prejudices were very strong, and she dared not think to what lengths they might lead her. Still, she again reflected, her nature was too kindly to allow her to be guilty of such gross injustice.

"So, Miss, they found you, did they?" asked Mrs. Marsh, shortly, as they came up the graveled walk. Her face bore evident traces of recent and violent emotion, and upon each cheek burned a bright red spot, while, as Christie imagined, there was a steely glitter in her eyes.

"Yes, Cousin Priscilla. I was not far away; only at the spring, you know."

"Walk in, gentlemen," continued Cousin Priscilla.

with stately courtesy which yet was intermingled with a certain fidgety nervousness of manner which her cousin could not understand.

"She must be at a white heat," she thought, wondering. "What can be the matter? It must be the 'Yankee.'"

"As the evening is so warm," said Mrs. Marsh, still fanning herself, "I will ask you to be seated on the portico for the present."

"She won't even invite him into her house," thought poor Christie. She would have liked to steal away to her own room but she dared not. Of what incivility might not Cousin Priscilla be capable in her absence? And her guest had come this long journey only to relieve her anxiety as to her sister-in-law. She looked at her reproachfully. How could she who was always so kind and hospitable be so unjust now, even though General Bradford was so lately an enemy? Surely she should put aside all recollection of this in view of his motive for intruding upon them. Suddenly Mrs. Marsh came and sat beside her. Laying her hand impressively on her shoulder, she said, solemnly, "Christie, you have borne sorrow amazingly. Do you think you can bear joy as well?"

Christie started up. "What is it, Cousin Priscilla? Oh, I know! Connie is here. How stupid of me not to suspect it before. Connie, dear Connie!" she cried, and would have flown at once into the house but that Cousin Priscilla caught and detained her.

"Wait a moment, Christie. Yes, Connie is here and"—

"Champney?" She clasped her hands in an agony of entreaty, and looked as though she were going to faint.

"Command yourself, Christie," said Cousin Priscilla, in as stern a tone as she could assume. "Yes, Champney too is here, and"—but before she could complete her sentence, Christie was gone like a flash.

They followed her hastily, fearing what might be the consequence of such sudden and excessive joy. She burst into the parlor, and there, standing ready to receive her, were her father, Champney and Constance. She reeled and would have fallen but that Felix Bradford, who was watching her closely, caught and bore her to a sofa that stood near.

"It's all my awkwardness," wailed Cousin Priscilla, as she saw the white face. "I might have known better. Oh, I have killed her; I just know I have. Water! water! why don't some of you bring water?"

"Calm yourself, my dear Mrs. Marsh," said Felix Bradford, quietly. "She is only a little faint; she has not even lost consciousness. Have no fear. Joy seldom kills."

"Father!" said Christie, gaspingly, "oh, father, can it be you?"

He came forward with a halting step, leaning heavily upon the staff in his hand. She now sat up, and he seated himself beside her. She threw her arms about his neck and burst into tears.

"Oh, it's too good to be true," she sobbed. "I thought you were dead—burned that night at Malvern. Are you sure you are alive?"

"Very sure, my darling, though I have often been inclined to doubt the fact myself since I have known that you and Champney are restored to me. It seems as though I must be in another world than that in which I suffered so much."

"But, father, dear, dear father, all that is over

now," she said, as she stroked the hair blanched to snowy whiteness since she had seen him. "We will all be so happy together."

"Yes, thank God!"

"And when am I to receive some notice, little sister?" asked Champney. "I am as jealous as ever I can be."

"Oh, Champ," going to him in turn, "I am almost crazed with joy. What have I done to deserve all this? And Connie, too," smiling at her through her tears; "oh, it is too much!"

"If you think so, we'll all go back again," said her brother, laughing.

"You know what I mean, Champ. Ah, I see you are the same old tease. Misfortune has taught you nothing, it seems."

"There you are mistaken," he answered, gravely.

But we will not remain with them. Cousin Priscilla and the two gentlemen have quietly withdrawn some time ago, and she is now seated in the hall, vigorously rocking and fanning herself, only pausing occasionally to wipe her eyes with her handkerchief. By-and-by, she remembers that her guests—of a number somewhat formidable in the present state of her larder—must be hungry, having traveled so far, and should be provided with supper.

So she goes out to consult with Aunt Susan, her old cook, who has remained faithful to her mistress, as to ways and means. This point settled, she relates to her the scene she has just witnessed, breaking down, however, as she describes the meeting between father and daughter. Her listener is much interested—there is no more sympathetic, emotional race than the African—and has recourse to her own apron more than

once during the recital. "Bless de Lawd!" she exclaims, "He know His sheep an' fetches 'em back ter de pastur, it make no odds how fur dey strays erway."

When quiet had been restored among the little party in the parlor, mutual explanations ensued. It had been long before Constance had found Champney. Indeed, it was by Felix Bradford that he had been at last discovered. Upon his return to the North, he had instituted a vigorous search for his friend. He finally learned in what prison he had been confined. Continuing his inquiries, he found that he had been wounded in the head, and shortly removed to a hospital. Thence, as time went on, and he was still the victim of mental hallucinations, which, at first, were thought to be only the result of the fever, he was taken to a Lunatic Asylum near the city of New York, and here General Bradford had found him. His case was considered a mild, but hopeless one. Without telling the anxious wife of his discovery, Felix Bradford had the invalid removed to his own apartments in the city and placed under the care of a physician who was especially skilled in mental disorders.

For some time it had been hoping against hope, but at last, there were some favorable symptoms which, continuing, the physician thought it advisable that his patient's wife should be admitted to his presence. From this time, his recovery was more rapid. He had recognized her at once, and her society soothed and cheered him as nothing else could have done. His restoration was now complete. "And, under God, I owe it all to Felix Bradford, Christie," he said. "No man could have done more for another than he *did for me*, but he insists that it was only the payment

of a just debt to you—that, but for you, he wouldn't have been alive to have come to my rescue.”

“I determined not to write to you, Christie,” said Constance, “until I had cheering news to give you. Trying as was the suspense I knew you to be enduring, it seemed to me less painful than to say to you that my search had proved fruitless. But I never lost hope. I believed to the last that Champney would be found. When I did write, after his recovery was assured, I suppose the letters missed you as you had at that time left Richmond. We didn't know that dear father was alive until our return. General Bradford came with us to Oakwood. Riding almost immediately over to Malvern, he found father living in Uncle Daniel's cabin, carefully tended by him and Mammy Judy.”

“And I have so long mourned them too as dead,” said Christie. “How glad I am that they escaped that horrible fate.”

“Yes, we too believed them to be dead. Father says no words can do justice to their faithfulness. That is something we cannot sufficiently appreciate when we consider how many of our slaves proved treacherous.”

“It's no more than I would have expected of them. I hardly know how I would have lived through that dreadful time of father's illness if they hadn't been there to cheer and sustain me. And so you came on to Richmond to look for me?”

“Yes, but I had written to you of our coming. I wanted to go to Oakwood first to make ready for you as I had made up my mind to take you home with me. In Richmond we met Carroll, and we all decided to come here together.”

“But how did you learn that I was here?”

"We didn't know it, but we remembered that Cousin Priscilla owned property near here, and thought perhaps you had taken refuge in the town."

And so they talked on of their numberless adventures since last they had seen each other. How happy they were! Cousin Priscilla complained, with some reason, that justice had not been done the supper she and Aunt Susan had been at so much pains to prepare for them. The plainest dish would have seemed ambrosial in their present mood.

An hour afterwards they were all quietly seated in the parlor, Christie beside her father, holding fast to one of his hands as if she feared again to let him go. Felix Bradford and Carroll Massey sat a little apart from the rest talking in low tones to each other. At length they rose, and coming forward, stood before Christie. She looked up wonderingly. Her heart gave a great throb as she saw that the crisis of her fate was upon her. She began to breathe heavily, and held her father's hand tightly grasped in both her own, feeling that in him was her sole anchor of hope. The room swam round her as she listened to Carroll's words, spoken low, but each striking like a hammer on her ear.

"Christie," he said, and there was an unusual solemnity in his tones, "we have come to you to decide our fate. You know how long and faithfully I have loved you. He has done the same, almost from the first moment he saw you. But his lips have been sealed during these past dreadful years, alike from the belief that you preferred myself to him, and that you would spurn from your presence one who wore the Federal uniform. That night at Malvern you bade him go bring back your father and brother before he dared again to speak

to you of love. He has done so. He is too generous to remind you of this, but I cannot allow you to forget it. His claims are superior to mine. I can only plead that I have loved all my life and will do my utmost to make you happy. I have little besides myself to offer you. I am now a poor man. Bradford is rich, yet I know, and he knows, that this fact will not have a feather's weight in influencing your decision. If we thought so we would not be here now. Do not fear to speak out your true sentiments. Whichever you may choose we have sworn to be friends and to hold you blameless. Which shall it be, Yankee or Rebel, Christie?"

She saw them as through a mist; Carroll with his fine face aglow with generous emotion, looking so noble that even in that moment she could not repress a strong feeling of gratitude that she had been deemed worthy to be loved by such a man,—Felix Bradford standing with folded arms, silent and motionless as a statue, yet his dark eyes blazing with a fire that caused her own to droop before them.

"Speak, Christie," said Carroll, hoarsely. "Don't you see that every moment seems an eternity of time with us?"

She turned appealingly to her father. "Follow the dictates of your own heart, my daughter. They are alike dear to me. I absolve you from the promise you once made me."

Then she gave a glance of mute entreaty at Champney. "My answer is the same as that of my father, Christie. They are alike dear to me. It is for you to choose."

She looked like some hunted creature as she sat there, her dry lips refusing to speak. Constance

resolutely refrained from looking towards her, and Cousin Priscilla's face was buried in her handkerchief. The latter now burst out reproachfully, "I think it's a shame! As if the poor child hadn't already had enough excitement to kill an ordinary person, but you must go and badger her life out of her in this way. You shall do so no longer in my house," she continued, working herself into a high state of indignation.

"Don't, Cousin Priscilla," said Christie, gently. "Carroll is right. This is a question that must be decided sooner or later,—the sooner the better." Her voice grew firmer as she went on. Commanding herself by a strong effort, she said, "Promise me again, each of you, that whatever I may do you will still be my good friends as well as friends to each other."

They gave the required assurance.

Then she went quietly to Felix Bradford, and said humbly, "I am all unworthy of the love you have given me, but such as I am, I am yours."

He took the hand she extended to him, kissed it reverently and laid it within his arm, but said nothing.

"So be it, Christie," said Carroll, solemnly. "And now—good-by."

She sprang forward and caught him by the arm. "Oh, Carroll—my brother, don't go. You will break my heart. You don't know how hard it all is for me."

"Yes, I know," he said, gently, "and some day I will learn to rejoice in your happiness, but I must go now—must be alone until the first shock is past."

She looked up at him beseechingly. "Carroll, you will not let this affect your future? You will live worthily?"

"Yes, Christie," the same earnest solemnity in his tones, "God helping me, my life shall be just such as you would have it—full of honest purpose, which, if I fail to carry out, it will be my misfortune and not my fault. There, go to him now. He is worthy of you—the only man I know to whom I would have been willing to surrender you."

He led her to his rival, silently wrung a hand of each, and, bowing to the others, left the room.

Christie threw herself in her father's arms and hid her face on his shoulder. He silently kissed her and stroked her hair, while his eyes grew suspiciously dewy. "I believe I'll always stay with you, father," she sobbed. "I won't go with either of them."

"Nothing would please me better, my darling."

"Oh, Christie," wailed Cousin Priscilla, "how—could you—treat—poor Carrol so?" Then, conscious of her incivility, she tried to make amends. "Not—but what—I like—General Bradford—well enough—but—but—"

"But he's a Yankee, and you like Carroll ever so much better," said that gentleman, smiling. "My dear madam, I do not blame you in the least. Massey is a noble fellow—how noble I never knew until now. No words can tell you how much I regret the fact that my happiness must be purchased at his expense."

Somewhat mollified, Cousin Priscilla took down her handkerchief and looked earnestly at the man who had supplanted her favorite. Her face softened as she did so. "Carroll is not the only noble man I know," she said, sententiously.

How it was managed, she never knew; but, ere long, Christie found herself alone in the room with Felix Bradford. As she realized the fact, a great

trembling seized her. She started up with the vague intention of stealing away—anywhere, that she might be out of his sight. But she felt her hand caught in a warm clasp, and, in another moment, she was drawn gently to a seat beside him on the sofa.

“My darling,” he said, in a low, soft voice—how rich and musical were its tones!—“why are you afraid of me?”

He tried to look into the downcast eyes, but she kept them successfully veiled. And still she trembled like an aspen leaf, as it is stirred by the wind. He drew her closer to his side and stroked the shining hair.

“Why is it?” pleaded the low, tender voice. “Won’t you tell me?”

“I—I—I don’t know—I believe I am a little afraid. Perhaps it is because—because—you are a—Yankee.”

He laughed. “That is a formidable word for a Southern maid, I admit. And I agree with you that it requires an extraordinary amount of courage to marry one of the horrid creatures. That you have consented to do so, fills me with a surprise and rapture that know no bounds. Dear, do not think me unappreciative because I have said so little. I fully realize the sacrifice you have made—and will make in the future.”

“It is no sacrifice,” she said, looking up boldly for the first time. But again her eyes drooped before the dusky splendor of those she found bent upon her. That brief glance, however, revealed to her a face illumined, transfigured with a tender, almost holy joy. She knew that this proud, self-contained man had given her a love such as a woman rarely receives, and while her heart was thrilled with a grateful sense

of its sweetness, she inly prayed that she might be worthy of the great gift that had come to her. There was a dewy softness in his eyes, and a happy smile about his mouth as he answered her.

"Those are very sweet words for me to hear, but, nevertheless, I know full well that it will be long before I will be tolerated by any except your nearest friends. I can be very patient, however, and feel sure of overcoming their prejudices at last."

"That is a phase of the matter I hadn't thought of," she replied. "It seems to me you are the one who makes the real sacrifice. I am only a poor Southern girl with no fortune to recommend her, and you"—

"And I am rich," he said, exultantly. "Ah, how glad I am for your sake."

"I would have married you all the same had you been as poor as I."

"I know that quite well, and the knowledge is very sweet to me."

"But you wouldn't ask me to do so when you were poor and I was rich," she said, reproachfully.

"No, I could not do that."

"Ah, you were too proud. Had you asked me then, my answer would have been the same as now."

"Is it so? Did you really love me so long ago as that?"

"What right have you to question me so? Do you know, *mon ami*," and she blushed like a rose, "that you have never yet told me you loved me? How am I to know that you do? Carroll assured me of the fact, but you did not. You asked me to marry you that night at Malvern, and he asked me in your stead to-night, but that was all."

He smiled fondly down upon her. "You shall

not complain of such neglect again," catching up her hands and kissing them passionately. "My darling, I love you, I love you, I love you! Now, do you believe me?"

"Perhaps; but why didn't you tell me sooner?" she persisted.

"Why? I did. If ever a man poured out his soul upon paper I did that thing when I wrote to you telling you of my love. And you were cruelly silent. I thought such eloquence should have touched a heart of stone," and he laughed,—he could laugh now at the long-forgotten heroics of which he had been guilty.

She looked up wonderingly. "When was that?"

"When? Christie, do you mean to tell me that you didn't get those letters of mine written to you from my home after leaving Cairo?"

"No, I hadn't a line from you except the little note brought by Firefly, and that was intended for others as well as myself."

"Had I known this, how much we might have been spared. But how can you account for your failure to get those letters? Your uncle would surely have forwarded them to you."

She reflected a moment. "I know," she said. "It was that wretched Mrs. Gurney."

"I think, perhaps, you are right. But we will forgive her now, will we not?" And in truth they were in a mood to forgive the most grievous wrong. We will not linger longer with them. It is only the old, old story we all know so well, yet which, forsooth, they would prefer that we should not tell.

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CHAPTER XIV.

LIGHT AFTER DARKNESS.

FOR those who object to a well-rounded story—who like something left to the imagination, we will ask that they read “Finis” at the close of the last chapter. But for others who regard marriage as only the beginning and not the end of life, we have still something to say.

Two years after the events narrated therein, a new Malvern had arisen from the ashes of the old, of which Felix Bradford was the master. His own inclination leading him to a residence in the South; and knowing how strong was his wife’s affection for the old place, he had purchased the claims of the various heirs to the Royston estate, and was now able to fulfill the demand she made so imperiously upon him on the night of the fire: “Restore to me the home of my ancestors.” Her father found himself in possession of a library which, if lacking the tender associations of that which had been destroyed, was yet a constant reminder of his son-in-law’s thoughtful consideration of his happiness. Here the evening of his days are quietly spent in the pursuit of his favorite studies. He has never entirely recovered from the lameness resulting from the stroke of paralysis, and his articulation is somewhat indistinct; otherwise his health is as perfect as even those who love him best could wish.

Naturally, it required some years for General Brad-

ford to overcome the prejudices against him, but now he feels secure in the respect and esteem of all who know him. The influence of Champney Royston and Carroll Massey in the neighborhood did much for him in this respect, but it is chiefly owing to his own nobility of character that he has succeeded in making his wife's friends his own as well. The title of "General" has clung to him among a people who are so fond of bestowing such honors even upon those who have no claim to them, and it is spoken with pride by many of his neighbors, but especially by the old family negroes upon the estate.

It was long before Uncle Daniel and Mammy Judy could be brought to regard their young mistress' marriage with equanimity, but they have now forgiven her *mesalliance*, and look upon "the Gincerl" with as much reverence as if he belonged to the "qualerty" of their own State. In the Malvern nursery, Mammy Judy reigns supreme. She often thrills the souls of her young charges with blood-curdling stories of the war, especially with accounts of how "me an' Dan'l saved ole marster—that's yer gran'pa, honey—from gittin' burned up. That was the night yer Ma'd a-been burned up too ef it hadn' a been fur yer Pa." They have conceived an intense aversion for those terrible Yankees who were such engines of destruction, but the feeling is purely an impersonal one, and they have no idea that their own father is one of the obnoxious animals. Mammy Judy takes care of that. A Yankee with them is simply a great ogre going about the world seeking whom he may devour—like those monsters of whom Jack-the-giant-killer rid mankind, or the bear who ate up poor little Red Riding-hood.

"If he comes botherin' roun' me," says little Car-

roll, squaring himself and defiantly doubling his chubby fists, "I'll jest give him a black eye, that's all."

"An' I'll scal' him with hot water from my mamma's tea-kettle," says Miss Christie, savagely.

"An' I'll s'oot him wid my dun," shouts Master Dudley. "Down he goes—pop!" and straightway he lets fly a missile from his blow-gun at an imaginary foe.

"An sarve him jes' right, honey," says Mammy Judy, with an approving nod of the head. What her master and mistress may say to all this she does not stop to consider. Indeed, the suspicion has not even entered her mind that she may be sowing seeds which might, in the future, bring forth evil fruits. And she will do no real harm. All these tales will be remembered only as part of her wondrous nursery lore.

A neat, whitewashed cabin, with vine-wreathed porch, and garden filled with hollyhocks and other showy flowers, is now the home of herself and Uncle Daniel. He is still an oracle among his colored brethren, and some there are who have implicit faith in his Satanic powers—a belief which he rather encourages, "jes' ter see whut fools these niggers kin be." He potters about the garden at "the house" occasionally, and assumes other light tasks which he thinks can be performed by no one but himself. One office he delegates to no one else—that of attending upon his old master at his meals. His grand bows and flourishes are infinitely amusing to Annie Bradford, the General's sister, who never tires of watching his queer performances.

But she is a member of the family to whom the reader must be introduced. Soon after her brother's marriage, the death of their mother left her alone in

their early home. The sisters-in-law had already grown to be fond of each other, and so, when General Bradford finally decided to make his home in Virginia, it was, comparatively, an easy matter to persuade her to accompany them.

Carroll Massey, relinquishing all claim upon his father's estate, gave it up to his mother, sisters and maimed brother. Through the influence of Champney Royston with some of his old professors at the University of Virginia, he succeeded in establishing a school for boys near his old home. In the carrying out of this scheme, he found Felix Bradford's advice to be invaluable, from his superior experience in such matters. The ladies at Cloverdale were only too glad to have his pupils as boarders, thus making an agreeable addition to their reduced income. Thither came Jack Royston and several of his Texas friends, preparatory to going to the University. The angularities of his character were gradually softened down, and he became in manner what he had always been at heart—a gentleman.

Meantime, Annie Bradford, who, like her brother, regarded idleness as the greatest enemy both of man and womankind, prevailed upon him to allow her to establish a girls' school near Malvern. The experiment proved eminently successful. Many girls from the malarial regions of the South and South-west were sent to her care, among them Violet Roy and Ginny Royston. A strong friendship had sprung up between the principals of the two schools, and it was with unfeigned delight that General and Mrs. Bradford watched its gradual change into a warmer feeling. When their union finally took place, it was with the hearty approval of all their friends, for Annie had

already established herself firmly in the affections of Carroll's family. There were no prejudices to overcome in this case on the score of her Northern birth. She proved to be to her husband a helpmeet indeed. Her frugal, industrious, New England habits now stood them in good stead. Already they have a comfortable competency, with a fair prospect of better things in the future.

"I can never be sufficiently grateful to you, Christie," said Carroll to her the other day. "But for you I would never have known Annie. You did me a kindness, after all, when you refused to marry me."

"It is often so, Carroll. What we choose to consider misfortunes are but blessings in disguise."

The widowed daughter of Mr. Lewis Royston with her children had returned to live with her parents after the war, so that they were not left alone while Jack and Virginia were away, for Max, poor Max, lies buried in the soil of that grand old State, whose fertile bosom is scarred with the graves of so many of our best and bravest. In course of time, Jack returned to Texas from the University, carrying with him his diploma in law.

One object of his ambition has been accomplished. He has been taken into partnership by Judge Roy, and at once inducted into a lucrative business. When the time came for this, however, Jack rather demurred to the arrangement. "You're making things too easy for me, Judge," he said. "I ought to work my way up without help from you or any one else."

But the Judge was growing old, and wanted Jack's sturdy young strength to lean upon, so the matter was at last satisfactorily settled. It is almost needless to inform those who have watched the drift of

events that he married Violet and that "they lived happily ever thereafter." When Christie and her husband stopped to see them not long ago on their return from a visit to General Bradford's cattle ranch in the West, she was amused to hear Mrs. Jack Royston declare her husband to be the handsomest man in the United States. She furthermore averred that he had so completely cured himself of his early failings that there was nothing left for her to do in that respect. Christie, however, looking at Jack's honest face, could not agree with the little lady as to his personal beauty, and she observed that there was an occasional *lapsus linguæ* which his loving wife did not seem to hear. Both, she and General Bradford enjoyed meeting with their old friends.

"Ah, Chris," said Eb. Banks—"I knowed ye wur a sly one. Ye thought ye fooled this ole coon but ye wur mistooken. I says ter myself, s'I, 'that's all in my eye, Betty Martin,' when ye put on breeches ter keep our folks fum a-tairrin' an' a-featherin' ov the Ginerul here. I knowed ye wouldn' a-done that fur nothin'. Take keer, Ginerul, take keer, or she'll be a-wantin' ter wear 'em all the time now 'at she's done l'arned how. That's the way weth these wimmin-folks the worl' over, an' I reckon Chris ain't no diffunt fum the res' ov 'em. An' talkin' 'bout'n wimmin now, put me in min' o' Miss Gurney. I reckon ye hain't forgot her, Chris. She useter keep the pos'-orfus at Cairo. Well, ef she wa'n't the beatenes' one o' the creeturs 'at ever I come acrost, then I give yer leave ter hang me weth the same rope 'at broke the necks o' pore Cross an' Alden. I sposen ye heerd 'bout'n how come she ter take weth a leavin' o' these diggin's, hain't

ye? No? I 'lowed maybe so 'at the 'Square'd done tole ye all 'bout'n hit. Well, hit wur thes this-a-way. Ye know—or maybe ye don't, but a heap o' folks doos—'at she had a mighty hankerin' attar t'other folks's letters, an', pertickler, ef ther' happened ter be a shin-plaster or anythin' o' that sort in 'em; somehow or 'nother they had a way o' stickin' ter her fingers like es ef they mought a-had tair or somethin' on 'em, an' they didn' git back in the letters no mo', an' sometimes the letters themselves didn' git back in the pos'-orfus, nuther. Well, sir, she tried that leetle game thes onct too of'n, an' got ketched at it. She cried, an' she swore, an' she got inter all sorts o' tantrums sech as wimmin-folks knows ser good how ter git up, but hit didn' do no good. Our folks thes tole her up an' down how she mought take her ch'ice atwix' a-goin' ter court an' makin' herself sca'ce in this part o' the worl'. Well, then, she got kinder sorry an' owned up everthing—how she stolt them letters the Ginerul writ ter ye attar he 'skipped by the light o' the moon' that time, an' any. Well, we all got sorter sorry fur her at las' bein' es she wur a pore lone woman, an' I reckon hit'd a-ended in our lettin' her off, but that night she sloped, an' we hain't seed nor heerd nothin' mo' ov her fum that day ter this, an' the neighborhood's been a heaps mo' quieter sence too—not half ser many scanderlous tales a-goin' about. Ye know," he continued, drawing his chair nearer to her and speaking in a low tone, 'at she 'knowledged she stolt them letters fur that thar Juli'n Lambut, but we don' talk 'bout'n him no mo' now on the ercount o' Eunice. I reckon ye seed her weth Miss Linton yistiddy at meetin', didn' ye? She's the fines' gal in all these parts sence you and

Cory Linton's off the kyarpit. Did ye take notice o' how the folks was fixed up an' all at meetin', Chris? Sorter diffunt fum whut hit wur when ye was here, wa'n't hit? Why, even the Black-foot Nashun—ye hai'n't furgot about the Nashun, has ye? I ricollecks how ye mighty nigh killed yerself a-laughin' when I tole ye that tale 'bout'n the leetle nigger. Ye see, sir," turning to General Bradford, "the folks up thar useter let the'r childern run aroun' kinder permiscus-like, an' onct a year they gethered 'em all up an' tuk 'em ter a big pon' o' water, in ermongs' the hills, an' washed 'em off an' dervedid 'em out. Well, sir, a leetle darkey'd strayed up thar somehow or 'nother, one time, an' they liketer scrubbed the skin off'n the pore squealin' shaver afore they foun' out he wur a nigger. I'm danged ef they didn't, sir," seeing the look of incredulity in his listener's face. "But no sech a thing es that could happ'n thar now, I kin tell ye. Sence the relroad an' telerguph an' all them's come, they've got ter be kinder like white folks oughter be. Taxis is the greates' kentry yit, Chris." But for those who may chance to be interested in the fate of Eb. Banks, Julian Lambert and others of our Texas acquaintances their further fortunes are told elsewhere.

Mr. Banks had spoken aright concerning the rapid advancement of his adopted State. It was with great interest and pleasure that General Bradford noted its immense progress since his residence there.

"The Texans say truly that their State is an empire within itself," he said to his wife. "Relieved of the incubus of slavery, she is making swift strides toward a civilization, of which even our New England States would not be ashamed. The longer I know your people, Christie, the more I admire and respect them.

History scarcely furnishes a parallel to the heroism and pluck with which they have borne and met all difficulties since the war."

"There is still vast room for improvement," she sighed.

"Ah, well, that will come in time. Such radical changes cannot be effected at once."

"I will accuse you of having turned Southerner," she said, smilingly.

"No, I still love my own peculiar section of country as much as ever, but I find I have ample room in my heart for both. North and South are alike dear to me. Heaven speed the time when this shall be the case with every citizen of the United States."

"It is coming, Felix. Already it is no longer remembered against me that I married a Yankee."

"No, thank God!"

THE END.



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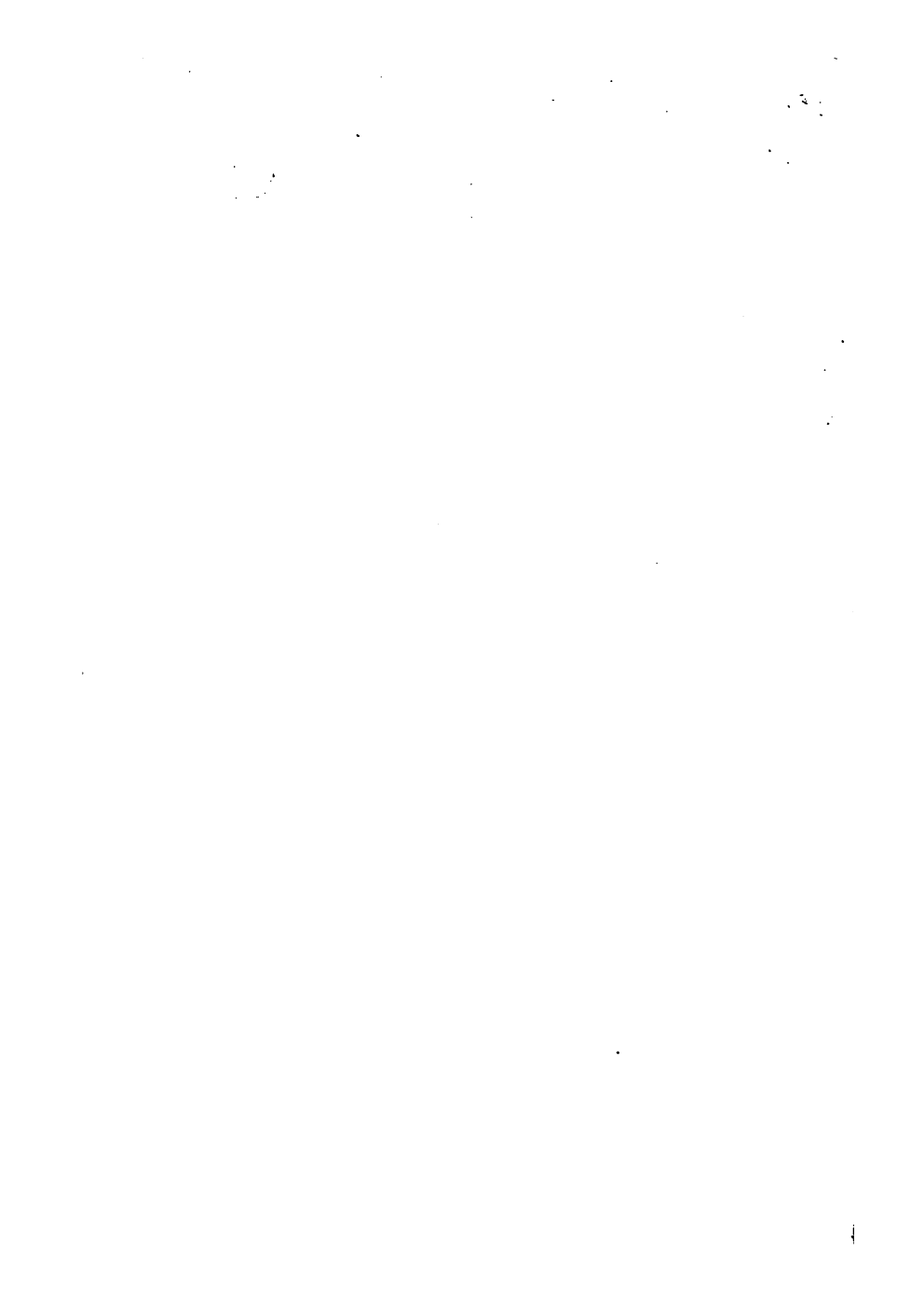
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